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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THREEFOLD COMMITMENT IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT BLY

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Arts

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Threefold Commitment in the Poetry of Robert Bly, submitted by Randall Alexander Kizuk, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is designed to argue a case for the uniqueness of Robert Bly's contribution to American literature, and to attempt an interpretation of his poetry. Within these objectives, two related problems have been pursued: (1) that Bly's poetry may be so unique that it disconnects itself from American poetry, and (2) that, in its uniqueness, it appears to defy rational interpretation. Thus the thesis is primarily an analysis of Bly's poetic oeuvre, which isolates specific aspects of the poetry that are original and peculiar to his attitudes toward American poetry, yet concomitant to, or contingent on, contemporary developments in American poetry. The secondary thrust is an interpretation of these aspects, as they appear in specific poems. The thesis functions to validate the hypothesis that Robert Bly's commitment to the poetic art provides an adequate framework to appreciate the uniqueness and meaning of his poetry.

The structure of the thesis is simple. Bly's commitment to poetry is analyzed from three separate but related perspectives: morality, sacrality, and aesthetics. Chapter 1 discusses Bly's poetry of social and political content, and derives the moral facet of his commitment from a rhetorical assumption of the structuralist concept of the narrataire, or implied reader. In Chapter 2, the rhetorical approach of

Chapter 1 is abandoned in favour of a coercive model, which more efficiently illuminates Bly's prose poetry in terms of faith, mysticism, and religious syncretism. The third chapter attempts to evaluate the foregoing nonaesthetic elements of Bly's commitment, and their bearing on the aesthetic facet of his commitment to the art of poetry, which come forward most poignantly in his poetry of pastoral or Wordsworthian content. These three major facets of Bly's commitment to his art are shown to be observable in specific poems, and to combine in unique configurations of meaning.

The thesis is the only existing study of Robert Bly's recent work, and devotes a great deal more thought to his prose poetry than other studies on Bly's work. Moreover, the thesis provides a framework that other critics may find useful in dealing with a body of poetry that resists critical analysis, yet continues to assert a considerable influence upon contemporary developments in American poetry.

PREFACE

Part of the problem of dealing with commitment as a literary phenomenon, existing in the forms and meanings of literary artifacts, is that one is forced to employ, as George Eliot says in Middlemarch, "the doubtful illumination of principles still more doubtful." Yet Robert Bly's growing influence upon young writers in Canada and the United States demands a critical formulation, or an on-going re-formulation, of what can, or should, be learned from his poetry, and how much of what Bly writes is an aberration from, or development of, the literature of North America. My thesis does not answer such epistemological, moral, or literary demands. Its scope and aim are determined by my grappling with a problem that is itself the culmination of extensive and intensive inquiry, analysis, and reflection. What I have to offer is a formulation of a problem that may be useful as a first step in the direction of a solution capable of articulation in the larger arenas of literary criticism. If Bly's peculiar but intense and consistent commitment to his craft supplies the necessary focal point for dealing with his poetry, how can his commitment be described in a literary context?

My first contact with Robert Bly's verse, in the Fall of 1978, impressed me with a sense of community, by which I mean that the poems

seemed to address a community of listeners, in such a way as to affirm the value of a community. My study of Bly's sources in Spanish and South American poetry seemed to confirm community as a central theme in Bly's work. However, upon reflection it became clear that Bly's poems did not of themselves furnish any indication of exactly what community they addressed. Certainly they did not address the literary, political, and financial establishments of the United States; and almost as certainly they did not address a simple country folk, since the poems demand considerable advanced training in comparative literature and psychology. Despite Bly's insistence on spiritual values, in American society as well as American poetry, his anti-Christian, or syncretist, biases dispelled any notion of a Blakean ideal of brotherhood. Trusting my initial impression, I turned to literary theory for a means through which to argue the theme.

Eventually, I came across an idea that French critics and structuralist theorists have pursued through the late 1960's and the first part of the 1970's. The idea of the narrataire, or implied rader, received its first extended expression by Gerald Prince, in the French journal Poétique, in 1973. The idea allowed me to assume that the sense of community I had initially perceived, was, in a sense opposed to the idea of an audience external to literary artifacts, an internal part of the meaning of individual poems. That is to say that the message of a poem is a bivalent relation between a "speaker" and a "listener," both of which are implied by the text. The concept of the implied reader cast my sense of community into terms not unlike those that treat the autonomy of poetic drama.

It occurred to me at this point that Bly's interest in Rilke, Trakl, and Ibsen could be used to support the idea that his poems addressed an ideal audience, which was implied, or existed solely within the confines of artifice. Rilke's poetry often addresses an ideal community of "angels," or poets who express the "divine voice." Trakl's earlier poetry often evokes images of a decaying and moribund Christian Europe, which assume a certain affinity of sensibility in his readers. And Bly's interest in Ibsen's poems and plays shows that Bly is aware of the conventions of drama. Bly's poems could be said to communicate a sense of community to his actual readers, through a dramatic appeal to an ideal, implied audience.

American critics, such as Cleanth Brooks, have written that American literature needs a sense of community at this point in time. But Brooks represents the literary establishment that Bly has set himself up against, in his polemical statements. And even if it were enough to say that Robert Bly's contribution to American literary development was a sense of community, the only community that Bly's poems actually express is that between the poet and a nebulous ideal audience shimmering deceptively behind his poem. On realizing that Bly's poetry, taken as a whole, demonstrates an intense and consistent commitment to this form of poetic communication, it became clear that his commitment to his art was primary: the sense of community was a mere reflection of the communication between the poet and his poem.

It remained for me to analyze this commitment, in poem after poem, and to try to define its relative parts. In the political poems Bly's commitment seemed to draw upon a moral framework; in the prose poems

Bly seemed to draw more from a context of ideas and attitudes toward sacrality; Bly's poems of solitude and nature seemed to present images and structures drawn from a greater aesthetic concern. Thus my thesis begins with the assumption of the moral, sacral, and aesthetic aspects of the poet's commitment to his poetry.

The analysis of the problem of dealing with commitment as a literary phenomenon in Robert Bly's poetry determines the form of my thesis. The definition of the major parts of his commitment, and the description of their relationships, place Bly's commitment in a literary context, and illuminate his unique contribution to contemporary American literature. At one point early in my inquiry, I wrote to Mr. Bly, and explained my thoughts about community and commitment in his and other contemporary poets' work. In a letter dated 4 August 1979, Mr. Bly responded by saying: "I like the outlook -- or inlook -- you take into the poems I've written so far: I think it's a good place to look out . . . I write you this brief note to say, go ahead. What can you do wrong?"

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Chapter 1

THE MORAL FACET

Robert Bly holds himself answerable to certain absolute beliefs, and he is committed to the successful communication of these beliefs in aesthetic forms. In 1959 -- writing under the pseudonym "Crunk" in the third issue of his literary magazine, The Fifties -- Bly asserts that such modern poets as Pound, Eliot, Ginsberg, Eberhart, Shapiro, and Rexroth have each discovered ways of avoiding what is to Bly a crucial problem for the American poet: his identification with the middle class, and a consequent failure to create for himself a concept of the poetic life. "Since the country has no image of a poet as a poet, a poet to develop must learn to imagine himself."[1] For a poet to develop he must apply his creative energies not only to his craft, but to himself as a particular kind of being in society. To Bly, poetic craft and poetic ways of life have equal status; to Bly, this is an absolute premise.

In 1962 -- introducing an early collection of ten poems -- Bly suggests that one way for poets to imagine themselves is to remain faithful to the "fundamental world of poetry": an "inward world," that Pound and W.C. Williams failed to reach.[2] This pronouncement refers to the poetic way of life. In 1967 -- commenting on the first ten issues of the surrealist magazine, Kayak -- Bly stresses the importance of avoiding a tendency, among surrealist poets, to begin

writing a "conventional form of the underground lakes poem," by mistaking "a way of life for a style."[3] This statement reaffirms Bly's absolute belief in the "inward world" of the poetic life. Bly's consistent promotion of a concept of the poet, who is committed to being, acting, and creating as the poet imagines he must, shows Bly's own commitment. Bly attempts to project into comtemporary American society an ideal of artistic integrity, which he has imagined for himself, in order to develop as a poet. Through poetry, polemical statement, translations, and protest demonstrations Bly promotes an image of a poet that is inseparable from his own, actual way of life.[4]

I will show that Robert Bly, in his commitment to imagine himself as a successful poet, is morally obligated to maintain his way of life, at a juncture of the sacred and the profane, the inward and outward worlds. Between his perception of underground lakes and the danger of conventional forms, Bly is committed to creating aesthetic wholes that are morally and sacrally integral with his beliefs. The sacral and aesthetic elements are fully described in the following chapters, but what can be said at this point is that the task of drawing the reader's response toward these qualities in Bly's poetry is assigned to the intensity and consistency of his commitment.

However, I must point out that any writer actively engaged in the practice of his craft should be insulted if he were not considered by his readers to be "committed." Nevertheless, a writer's commitment manifests in active and passive states. A passively committed writer may choose not to act upon his beliefs, even if those beliefs are important to the meaning of his writing. He may be said to choose to

interact with the outward world in terms of ethical relativism. An actively committed writer may choose to act upon his beliefs in absolutist terms. The emotional give and take between commitment as a state of mind, and as a basis for action, will vary in a writer's works, even as it will vary in the works of one writer and another. Though Robert Bly inclines toward an absolutist position, many of his poems seem to be written out of a passive response to the outward world. Even Bly's absolute beliefs at times come to contradict one another, as I will show in Chapter 3, where Bly seems to affirm a kind of dualism while at the same time trying to overcome it. But contradictions and paradoxes are to be expected from a commitment, one of whose main characteristics is intensity. The fact that Bly's poems are written out of an intense commitment says little in itself, however; the ways in which the different aspects or phases combine are important to an understanding of his work, and its place in contemporary American literature. Bly's commitment to his art is remarkable in that his intense desire to fashion a unity of its three main facets achieves a configuration unique to American poetry. The three chapters of my thesis are designed to throw light upon the moral and sacral elements that contribute to the poet's aesthetic choices during the poetic process, and to focus upon each of the facets in turn. The present chapter discusses the moral side.

A Concept of the Audience as Poets

In order to define one aspect of Bly's commitment as moral, an analysis of his audience is essential, since, if his poems contain a moral message, the only proof one has lies in the understanding of

his audience. In basic communication theory, no moral message can be regarded as having been articulated unless it is received and understood by the audience. Bly is concerned about the necessity of poetry to be communication as well as art. Bly praises his fellow poet James Wright for freeing his language from Wright's earlier commitment to literary language to the extent that "hearable voices" and "visible images" come forward.[5] And Bly has often been polemically antagonistic toward such features of the language of verse as elaborate syntax and iambic meter, precisely because, to Bly, a conventionally literary language impedes the transmission of the poet's or the poem's message. In this chapter I discuss The Light Around the Body and Sleepers Joining Hands[6] in terms of the moral content of these collections. The morality of the poems collected in these works is best approached through their audience.

Though Bly seems to be concerned about the ability of contemporary poetry to communicate with an audience, he fervently denouces those readers whom many would regard as being the best poetry-readers, the most capable of understanding, or receiving, poetry. Readers who consider themselves as members of the literary world -- those who write about books -- are excluded from Bly's audience. Bly's absolute position on the Viet Nam war and contemporary American materialism, especially in the long poem "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last," demands from his readers a belief in the rightness of what he has to say. If a reader does not share the sensibility of such poems as "The Teeth Mother," either Bly would say the poem is not for him, or the reader would consider the poem a failure -- in terms of a successful

communication of a message. Consider these lines from "Teeth Mother":

> This is what it's like to send firebombs down from
> air-conditioned cockpits.
> This is what it's like to be told to fire into a reed
> hut with an automatic weapon.
> It's because we have new packaging for smoked oysters
> that bomb holes appear in the rice paddies
> It is because we have so few women sobbing in back
> rooms.
>
> (SJH, p. 23)

What is Bly saying? Something about materialism; something about war? Later in the poem, Bly pleads to his audience "Don't wake me," and "Don't tell me." An audience is implied by the language of the poem, but when one studies the poem, what happens is that its audience is eventually described through negations. The poem is saying: 'I want you to listen to what I'm saying -- but not you and not you and not you . . .' Take the closing lines, for example:

> Let us drive cars
> up
> the light beams
> to the stars . . .
> And return to earth crouched inside the drop of sweat
> that falls
> from the chin of the Protestant tied in the fire.
>
> (SJH, p. 26)

The lines do not of themselves explain why the two stanzas contrast the way they do, but through a search into Bly's other poems and prose statements, possible reasons emerge. The first rhyming stanza, in its echoing of Lowell's "Skunk Hour" -- the ascendance motif, Lowell's Trinitarian Church's "spar spire," the sudden return to the mundane -- combined with Bly's antagonism toward Lowell and the literary estab-

lishment he represents, seems to be saying: 'This part of the poem is not for you, for I write it only to turn you away.' The contrasting stanza re-enforces Bly's negating, or repelling strategy. The image, in condensing a vast stretch of history and space into a drop of sweat, in this context, seems to be a deliberate rejection of those readers who understand Lowell and are ignorant of European surrealism. The structures of the lines contrast, and the ascending motif is matched by a fall. A search through Bly's poems shows the second stanza to be an echo of his own "John F. Kennedy," in the poem "Three Presidents" (LAB, pp. 19-20). Thus, "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last" seems to imply no other audience than those who know Bly's work well, or know his sources.

In a situation such as this, it would not be a great leap to think of Bly as vain, self-seeking, or parochial. Allen Tate condemns Bly in such terms:

> He has some merit, but not enough, in my opinion, to justify his uninformed attacks on other poets, his self-advertising through his own journal The Sixties, his publicity-seeking at sit-ins . . . I do not know whether Mr. Bly is naive, politically or otherwise; I think naiveté, lies elsewhere, in the minds of persons who do not know that an historic way for a writer . . . to call attention to himself is to attack his elders and betters?

But "The Teeth Mother" has some merit; any reader may assume for the sake of argument that the poem is complete and comprehensible. Such an assumption gives the poem the benefit of doubt, and demands humility from the reader, while forcing him to exercise his imaginative faculties in a suspension of disbelief. I make this assumption now, in order to show that the moral quality of Bly's political poetry is understood,

or received, by an ideal and implied audience, existing only in the forms and meanings of individual poems and collections of poems.

The concept of an audience as a community of ideal listeners -- or poets, in the case of a poet's audience -- has been available to critics who would remain within the established traditions of criticism, and resist the mandatory act of faith that many of Bly's poems seem to call for, since the late 1960's. Though the idea of the narrataire, or ideal reader, is a "promising spinoff" of structuralism, my use of the concept will be mostly rhetorical. Since the idea is not well known, I will give a brief overview of its main proponents.[8]

Stanley E. fish and Jonathan Culler are two of the better known critics who have experimented with the idea, but Alain Robbe-Grillet's prescriptive criticism holds that a writer shapes, or invents, his reader, and constantly modifies the reader during the writing process. Gerald Prince was the first to conduct an extended, or taxonomic, treatment of the subject. In Prince's method a "degree zero narratee," which has no existence whatsoever -- beside a flawless memory -- outside of the text, is postulated in order to characterize the ideal reader of a text through degrees of deviation from degree zero. Prince's method has been refined by Mary Ann Piwowarczyk and William Ray. The considerably different approach of Fish and Culler -- the application of a model of the reading process -- has received extended treatment from Wolfgang Iser. Walter J. Ong, who pursues a model of reading and Prince's method, goes as far as to hold that all writers at all times in all kinds of writing, including oral literatures, engage in a process of "fictionalizing" the audience. Closer to home,

Merle Brown applies the idea in the form of "poetic listening" to the work of Stevens, O'Hara, and Ashbery, claiming that these poets write "twice-told" verse that has been listened to as it was being written down. To Brown the actual audience hears only the structural moment of a dialectic; "poetic listening" is his method of listening to the ethical moment. Serious contradictions, redundancies, and metholdological impasses plague the ideal reader theory. So much weight is placed upon the text that the text is regarded by some as a "glyph" of the writer's psyche. Subjectivity cannot be totally disavowed. The logical extension of the narrataire into the writer's ideal image of himself causes problems in the definition of writing as an act of human communication. But the ideal reader is basically a blank slate just before the act of reading, and is characterized by what he has learned, or received, after the text has been read. The ideal reader of "The Teeth Mother" is radically alienated from vast expanses of time and space, and the human experience of the history of America and the Western world. The ideal reader of that poem is left with the choice, by the end of the poem, either to cross into the "inward world" of Bly's way of life, or to abdicate being entirely.

Robert Bly fostered an image of himself as a pastoral quietist poet with the publication of Silence in the Snowy Fields in 1962, only to supplant this image with another one of a poet morally outraged, or of a poet as vatic seer. Critics were stunned when Bly turned his Acceptance Speech for the National Book Award for Poetry -- for The Light Around the Body, 6 March 1968 -- into a dramatic anti-Viet Nam protest demonstration. Bly's commitment to communicating a moral message is clear in the words he used on this occasion to chastise the

literary institutions who gave him the prize, and published his own books. He told them that they must "learn responsibility, learn to take their part in preserving the nation, and take their risk by committing acts of civil disobedience."[9] The image of a poet who was Robert Bly seemed to be changing horses in mid-stream. "But Bly hadn't changed at all," writes Bly's long-time friend Donald Hall:

> If the readers had noticed the old J.P. Morgan poems in New World Writing, they would have seen the politics of the outer world judged by the standards of the inner world -- and years before Viet Nam . . .[10]

Hall goes on to say that many of the poems in Light are actually older than poems collected in Silence:

> The Viet Nam war was the horrifying embodiment of the "father of rocks," and the "father of cheerfulness," which he had named years before . . .
> Bly's moral judgments about the war in Asia derived from his general system . . . and his moral judgment is not ad hoc.

Bly's actions in the political arena -- naive or not -- and the word of his friends, testify to the moral quality of his way of life as a poet.

The relationship between Bly's way of life, which excludes the literary establishment, and his ideal audience, which includes poets such as James Wright and Donald Hall, also includes moral action, such as the Acceptance Speech, and his rising early in the morning to raise the blue and white disarmament flag. In Bly's article "On Political Poetry," of 1967, he characterizes his audience as "the life of the country," meaning that his audience is a psychic, inward, or poetic consciousness that exists in American culture, and is on the side of

life, committed to opposing death.[11] Bly imagines his audience "as a psyche larger than the psyche of anyone living, a larger sphere, floating above everyone." Not only is his audience characterized by larger-than-life psychic dimensions, but no living human being can lay claim to it. In these remarks Bly's audience seems to be a principle of psychic life, which, threatened by a principle of death in the form of war, calls upon the poet to "preserve the nation." And when Bly says "America needs political poetry now, so it can see what is happening," one supposes it is the lesser sphere who needs this revelation. Thus the poet's sense of duty is called upon by the ideal audience, the larger sphere, the principle of life, and the lesser sphere, those who do the living. The larger sphere hears the ethical moment of the poet's answer, and the lesser hears the structural moment.

Such an imaginative idea of a poet's audience should warn the real readers -- you and me -- that what we are dealing with is the world of the mind, a poetic world of immateriality and sensations not bound by the laws of rational testing and contradiction. We are dealing with ideals and principles "not of this world." In a poem like "The Teeth Mother," we feel urged to reach into the poem for hidden sources of meaning, and an inner principle of experience. As Neruda is one of the major influences on Bly's ideas, it is interesting that Neruda expresses much the same idea of a psychic principle of life, in an image of dynamic form consumed yet brimming, contained yet vibrant with life, in his poem "Galope muerto."[12] David Gavitch -- one of the real readers of the lesser sphere -- believes that Bly's Sleepers reveals "the dominion of chaos and death," and man's moral

nature as "inadequate for the enormous consequences of his acts."[13]

In "The Dead World and the Live World," Bly describes poetry as an art that reaches out beyond the ego "in waves over everything alive," bringing the human world "news of the universe," which is invisible to the modes of perception tended by the planning, rational, "dying," traditions of Western culture. Bly cites Snyder as one who has brought the divine news into his poetry. Snyder's own idea of a poet holds that a poet must live a life of spiritual curiosity about the nature of consciousness. His poems will then generate "the sanctity or the sacredness of all sentient beings as an emotional concern."[14] His poems will heal society by making assurances of cultural sanity through integrating the discontinuities between society, culture, nature, and the universe. Bly also cites Machado as a poet "of the live world," and Machado believed that a penetration of the politics of artists -- answerable to the people and not to the state -- into the sphere of culture would produce a greater nucleus of common men who aspire to the spiritual. And Bly cites Trakl, whose early expressionist poems probed the limitations of a dying Christianity. Aside from the poet's duty to reveal man's "frail moral nature," he must commit himself to a way of life in which communication between himself and the universe is possible. His ability to bring "news of the universe" to those of us who do the living, is, to Bly, the measure of a successful contemporary poet. Bly chooses to fulfill his commitment to this imaginative concept of the poetic art by revealing his own communications with the life-principle. And be believes absolutely that such poetry will help to heal the moral needs of his country.

In these introductory comments I have attempted to evolve a concept of Bly's audience out of clues taken from his poems and his attitudes toward contemporary American poetry. Bly writes a form of closed communication between himself and the universe, which urges the actual readers to reach out for "news." Because the ideal audience is a principle of life and health, its moral righteousness cannot be questioned. News of the human world is not enough; the living must reach out beyond the ego into the "inward world," Bly's "fundamental world of poetry," that lies beyond reason, conventions, and human modes of perception. I will now turn to an analysis of individual poems in the two collections Light and Sleepers, in order to show how Bly's ideal audience and moral commitment function in poetic communication. I have characterized this audience and the moral quality that issues from it to some extent above, and I will return to add more characteristics toward the close of this chapter. Enough has been said at this point to undergird my treatment of the poems below.

Answering a Call to Service

Robert Bly's audience, or the audience implied as existing within his poems, is an ideal minority as small as a few friends in reality, and as large as the collective unconscious of the American people in more imaginative terms. Bly chooses to make a "closed" form of verse that the actual reader must read only at second hand, because he believes that such verse will help to heal the psychic and moral inadequacies of America. This is the moral facet of his commitment to poetry. The dramatic structure of such utterance urges the real readers to perceive moral standards that they cannot perceive any other way. If, by the end of the reading of one of Bly's poems the ideal audience has received

and contains the moral message, there must exist structural clues that the real reader can follow, in pursuit of that message.

One way that Bly gets his message across is a common rhetorical strategy that every teacher knows: telling one student in a class part of the answer required, and letting the class complete it for themselves. For example, the poem "Smothered by the World" (LAB, p. 7), first published in 1964 as "The Testament," betrays the teacher's strategy. This is the earlier version:

> Chrysanthemums crying out on the borders of death,
> Lone teeth walking in the icy water.
> The heavy body mourns!
> It howls outside the hedges of death,
> Pushed out of the enclosure.
> Now it must meet the death outside the death.
> Haven't you seen the cold faces outside the gate,
> The bag of bones warming itself in a tree,
> The rags constantly trailing those lumpish feet?
> There is a desolation that only the Egyption knows,
> Freezing at dawn in the desert,
> And the water jar turned over by a falling Testament.[15]

Bly opens the poem with a paradox: the lovely, vibrant "mums" are placed at a juncture between life and death, crying and silence. The light of the flowers -- their colour and form -- calls out from the earth, but to whom? The "you" of the poem, as is fitting for a degree zero narratee, cannot see the desolation outside of the gate, and so probably cannot hear the crying, nor feel the body's mourning. The speaker hears, sees, feels the desolation, and though he knows from whence it comes, he admits that he does not know what it is, in the last lines. He speculates that "only the Egyptian knows" what the calling, the unreal images of the teeth and the bones -- that cannot walk and cannot warm themselves -- and the mourning, are to mean.

News of the universe comes to the speaker, and he tries impatiently to communicate it to the ideal audience of the poem. The speaker hints that an interpretation might be found in terms of an ascetic vigil in which established religious doctrin, "a falling Testament," overturns a water jar. As in folklore, water is often symbolic of the unconscious, the feminine, and fecundity in Bly's verse. The rhetorical question that begins the second movement of the poem, at line seven suggests a shamanistic experience of "dream-death" in the image of the bag of bones in a tree, and a wandering desert ascetic in the "rags constantly trailing those lumpish feet." The closing lines are periphrastic and break off abruptly, leaving only paper where the predicate, demanded by the syntax, should be. This ending, together with the repetition of "testament" in the title, throws the actual reader's attention back to the first lines, where death, ice, water, and an unreal image of "lone teeth walking," all combine to add force to the evocativeness of the flowers. The real reader can see that "the borders of death," and the "icy water" are co-extensive metonymies that serve to make contiguous the temporal effect of the paradoxical flowers' calling to the speaker at a juncture between life and death. The image of the falling Testament and the spilling water jar also contribute to this juncture in the sense that the death released by the end of the poem is the death the lone teeth walk, and on whose borders the flowers call. The lone teeth contribute associations of hardness and solitude to the desert vigil. Thus the structural moment of the poem, as Merle Brown would say, is a circular progress that advocates firmness and solitude in the face of truths that "only the Egyptian knows." True interpretations are found through solitary vigils that drown the

validity of Testaments. This message is as cranky as the speaker's tone.

"The Testament" is explicit in addressing an audience, a "you," who is located inside hedges, and a gate. The speaker tells his audience about a circular way out of the safety of "the enclosure." The audience is threatened by desolation and death, unreality and flood. He chastizes the audience for its lack of perception, rhetorically; he hints at a possible interpretation by which the audience may come to understand what the speaker hears, sees, and feels. Now compare the way the poem appears in Light:

> Chrysanthemums crying out on the borders of death,
> Lone teeth walking in the icy waters,
> Once more the heavy body mourns!
> It howls outside the hedges of life,
> Pushed out of the enclosure.
> Now it must meet the death outside the death.
> Living outside the gate is one death,
> A bag of bones warms itself in a tree.
> Long and bitter antlers sway in the dark,
> The hairy tail howls in the dirt . . .
>
> (my italics)

Here explicit mention of a "you" is gone. The circular structural path is missing, and the annoyance in the speaker's tone is mitigated. The religious and ascetic lessons are not clear. Or has the speaker adopted another means of getting the same message across?

The new title, "Smothered by the World," is more in keeping with the sense of suffocation that the first section of Light is intended to express. It is also necessary, because the time-span that the poem contains has been extended from Biblical times backward: the prophetic ascetic has been replaced by sheer animal ferocity, antedeluvian survival. The added emphasis on life, and "one death" that lives

outside of the gate, extends the time-span into the present. These changes seem to make the speaker less fictional, and more intimate; the rhetorical questioning is gone. But a faint hint of Biblical language is retained in the plural form, "waters." The addition of the dramatic paired stress of "Once more" not only binds the third line to the second line's rhythm, but carries a notion of plurality through the poem's opening, which intensifies the image of the many-petalled "mums." These changes strengthen the opening that relied upon a circular associative pattern for its resonance, in the first version.

The first version suggests that the death released by the water jar, after the "fall" of religious doctrine, flows through the juncture between life and death, with its floral border, into the heavy, hard, wandering, and mourning body. Only "the Egyptian" knows of the desolation that human testaments can release upon the world; and only the lone ascetic can hear, see, and feel it. The circular structure, and the grammar of the fourth line, which locates the heavy body outside of the enclosure, and the rhetorical question, all address an audience dwelling inside the enclosure. The speaker chastizes an audience that suffers from circumstances similar to the Israelites' before the Exodus; Moses would be a likely name for the speaker, being both Jew and Egyptian, ideally suited to exclaim about the limitations of captivity, and the authority of the desert vigil. Bly's "dead world" is given fictional significance in the earlier version, in such a way as to hint that there is a way out of it, over "the borders of death." However, "The Testament" is a conventional poem compared to "Smothered." Its literariness, its division into two neat six-line movements, its rhetoric, allusion, circularity, and symmetry are

abandoned in the revision.

In "Smothered" Bly gives the real readers only the bare essentials of the message mapped out in "The Testament." But his decision to drop earlier literary and rhetorical strategies does not soften the impact of the poem. The revision parallels the evocative opening images with evocative images in the close, shifts the ground of authority away from Moses toward sheer survival, and dramatizes the poem with new paired stresses and the present tense. Changes to the fourth and seventh lines assure the audience it is addressed from outside the hedges of their enclosure. The body and the animals of the closing image -- perhaps a wolf bringing down a deer -- howl outside the gate. And the death that lives outside the gate is a shaman's death, which explains the temporal span of the poem as shamanistic "dream-time." Unlike the first version, the abrupt ending of "Smothered" does not cast the reader back to the beginning of the poem, but casts him into the blank space beneath an elemental kill.

In "Smothered by the World" the ideal audience is not told about a way out of limited perception; he is given the way. The ideal reader is not cajoled into seeing "cold faces outside the gate;" he is shown the gate. Without having to remember that in Light the Viet Nam war is an unjust killing, the ideal reader crosses the juncture between life and death to see the just killing of a beast for survival. If the actual reader tries to follow the path indicated by the revision, he will find the opening imagery unsupported by the structure of the poem. When he reaches the end of the poem his inability to understand the ethical message that one must, through solitude and the sacrifice of human ideas of what is right, recognize the morality of the non-

human, his inability to understand the ineffable is thrown back at him. And it is the actual reader's realization that his knowledge and perceptions are not adequate for an understanding of poetic, or inward truths, which will heal him. In the lesser sphere the poem tries to deflate intellectual vanity; in the larger sphere the poet's ideal audience receives a moment of higher morality. Bly addresses the implied audience of "Smothered by the World" as a teacher would address a class of smug students. In the earlier version the prophet speaks to us; in the revision we see him speaking alone on the mountain, as "Once more" the golden calf sways his antlers in the dark.

Another way that Bly communicates with his ideal audience, which leaves clues behind for you and I to follow, is the intimate whisper. I have selected the poem "Looking into a Face" (LAB, p. 53) to illustrate this method. The fifth and last section of Light bears a motto taken from the maverick Lutheran mystic Jacob Boehme, a "radical left wing" minority of one in his own time, known to be thrown out of churches for engaging the ministers in Socratic theological dialogue: "So then I found in all things good and evil, love and wrath, in creatures of reason as well as in wood, in stone, in earth, in the elements, in men and animals" (LAB, p. 51). Boehme's morality, like the morality that issues from "outside the gate," is characterized by a system of principles in which goodness and evil reduce all things to equal status, making reason and the elements one. Turning the page, the motto is followed by "Looking into a Face." If Charles Altieri is correct, Light is structured as a five-act drama.[16] The fifth section should resolve the conflicts of the book in action: the classical function of the fifth act. The dimunitive utterance of

"looking" is how the resolution begins:

> Conversation brings us so close! Opening
> The surfs of the body,
> Bringing fish up near the sun,
> And stiffening the backbones of the sea!
>
> I have wandered in a face for hours,
> Passing through dark fires.
> I have risen to a body
> Not yet born,
> Existing like a light around the body,
> Through which the body moves like a sliding moon.

This is the poem from which the collection takes its title. It is an intimate declaration of an experience that results from the speaker's communication with an unnamed listener; and like the wandering ascetic of "The Testament," the speaker passes beyond the borders of his own body, through "dark fires" of the body of the listener. In communication with another person, the speaker moves to the "sea" that lies within each man, the sea of immateriality and sensations, the sea of the mind, or the sea of the "psyche larger than anyone living."

The poem begins with images that are, for Bly, unusually solicitous of a sensual response, for the rising of the phallus near the sensuality of the body lies just below the surface. The poems "Taking the Hands" and "Walking from Sleep," both collected in Silence, do not carry these associations.[17] But the sensuality is made more manly by the strength of the image of talk "stiffening the backbones of the sea," and is immediately extinguished by the white space that separates this exclamation from the quieter reminiscence that follows. In past tense, the speaker describes his passage through the borders of another human body, and his "rising" to that body in terms so ambiguous

that the body "Not yet born" could be understood as his own, the other's or even a child's body. The closing lines constitute an extended metaphor modifying the phrase "a body/Not yet born," which contrasts rhythmically with the three adjacent stresses of the line above it. The flowing prose-rhythm, and the wide applicability of the closing imagery, function like a resonating-chamber for the sense of the couplet. The clear, simple image of the moonlit night is intensified by the strategies of the rhythms, allowing a multitude of associations to be generated. These associations radiate backward through the poem, giving the "light around the body" a haunting quality, and giving an overall sense of mistiness and risng under the heavy, corporeal rhythm of "Not yet born."

The first part of the poem relies upon the consonance of /k/, /b/, and /s/, and the assonance of the weighty /o/, contrasting with the quick, light /i/. The very last phrase of the poem returns to this ancient poetic technique, in order to attenuate the sound-play of the opening with the /u/ of "moves" and "moon," and the fine diphthong of "like" and "sliding." The syntactical circularity of "The Testament" is recalled by the cirularity of sound-play in "Looking." The light, which is actually a radiance reflected from a distant source -- the "dark fires" -- may be regarded as a reflection of the sun, in the third line of the poem. The body moves in darkness like the moon, but reflects the sun, just as the closing of the poem reflects its opening. The darkness through which the body moves may be regarded as the sea; the "light around the body" may be seen as a reflection floating on the "face" of the waters.

The complexity of the poem throws additional resonance around

the opening word: "Conversation." The poem is a conversation between several sets of opposites, such as sea and sun, light and darkness, closeness and distance. And the poem implies a conversation between the poet and his poem's audience. The wandering of the poem's speaker is bound by earthly, human time. The rising of the speaker's immanent body continues not "for hours," but is merely "Existing," beyond human concepts of time. As the poem dramatically enacts the rising of the body "Not yet born," an ideal audience should have received and understood the experience, by the end of the poem. But this experience is one of knowledge that the body has a counterpart in the larger sphere: that the poet has an ideal listener in the "psyche larger than anyone living," who dwells beyond "dark fires." It is an experience of timelessness that few real readers can say they know. The experience is communicated by an intimacy so intense that one is likely to think of "Looking into a Face" as a love poem, yet the conversation that takes place between a poet and his ideal audience, whose morality cannot be questioned. In a closed and dramatic context the poem seems to be saying: 'In gross, human, sensual terms I cannot pass beyond the enclosures of my flesh, the human concepts of duration that mean I will die, but in terms of the basic duality of man, nature, or the elements, my conflicts can be passed through, and my flesh reborn.' Thus the poem is an adequate poetic expression of the motto from Boehme.

A third way that Bly communicates his moral commitment is his use of imaginative presentations of his own inward, psychic crises -- intense experiences that are the benchmarks of his way of life. These

presentations require an ideally psychologically trained audience to be successful as acts of communication. Actually, only an audience who has already experienced crises similar to Bly's could truly feel the message in themselves; but this method can still help to heal the discontinuities that "only the Egyptian knows" by urging actual readers to reach within for the seeds of psychological experience, which will enable us to understand Bly's exempla.[18]

The one poem that uses this method most consistently is the long "Sleepers Joining Hands" (SJH, pp. 53-67). The moral of the poem recalls that of "Looking into a Face," in that a man must learn to develop to rise to a spiritual, or psychic, "light around the body" by travelling through the "dark fires" of fear and the unconscious. "Sleepers" recalls "The Testament" or its spiritual wanderer as well. In all the poems I have discussed so far there has been a recurring theme of a quest for a ground of authority, which may affirm the ways of life of the speakers. The authority of the Bible is surpassed by desert vigil and shamanistic "dream-death" in "The Testament"; the authority of the sensual body is surpassed by that of an immanent body, reached by traversing "dark fires," in "Looking." In "Sleepers" the "dream-death" casts the dreamer-narrator into a deeper dream, reminiscent of the dreamer of Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess," and many other Medieval romances. Incidentally, the old romances read as contemporary to Bly.[19] In the deeper dream the dreamer of "Sleepers" expresses the same overpowering of awareness by water, the elements, and conversation as the poems already treated:

I fall asleep. I meet a man from a milder planet.
I say to him: "I know Christ is from your planet!"
He lifts his eyes to me with a fierce light.
He reaches out and touches me on the tip of my cock,
and I fall asleep.

I dream that the fathers are dying.
Jehovah is dying, Jesus' father is dying,
the hired man is asleep inside the oat straw.
Samson is lying on the ground with his hollow hair.

Who is this that visits us from beneath the earth?
I see the dead like great conductors
carrying electricity under the ground,
the Eskimos suddenly looking into the womb of the seal . . .

Water shoots into the air from manhole covers,
the walker sees it astonished and falls.

(SJH, pp. 56-57)

The ground of authority in the poem is that "man from a milder planet," who is not Christ, as his sudden anger seems to indicate. But he may be characterized as a folkloristic "wise old man," like the old man who gives Jack his magic beans. Bly has recently worked out a theory of spiritual ascendance, and plans to use the theory in a forth-coming collection of what he calls "adult fairy tales." Briefly, this theory involves a Freudian hierarchy of three "transformers," whose function is to elevate an individual first from "mother-consciousness" to "father-consciousness," and finally to post-parental consciousness. The first transformer is the mother, and the prose essay in Sleepers elaborates on her. The second is the father: his function is to separate consciousness from "the mother," and he teaches morality.[20] The third is for most people Christ, but Bly feels that alternatives to Christ are needed at the present time. Bly's alternative is the "wise old man" figure, the guide who leads the spiritually ambitious traveller to the third stage. This third stage is not unlike Bly's idea of the "new brain," which is also elaborated in Sleepers' prose

interlude (SJH, pp 29-50). The "new brain" is basically a will to integrate the will to survive, the will to love and hate, and the will to develop spiritually.

In "Looking into a Face" the speaker rises out of his sensual body into an immanent, innocent body. In "Sleepers" much the same advance takes place, except that the passage is instantaneous. The dreamer's passage from father-consciousness to "the death outside the death" is caused by the brief contact between human flesh and spiritual authority. The phrase "the tip of my cock" intensifies the gross nature of the dreamer's state of being before contact, and contrasts with immateriality and sensations of what follows. It also expresses poignantly the dreamer's vulnerability before spiritual authority.

In "The Testament" the speaker can only speculate that "the Egyptian" may be able to contact spiritual knowledge through asceticism and "dream-death." In "Smothered by the World" Bly reserves this understanding for an ideal audience. In "Looking into a Face" he artfully and intimately presents a process through which actual readers of his poems can try to communicate with the larger sphere by means of intense communication in the lesser. In "Sleepers Joining Hands" he offers his ideally suited audience the example of his own imaginative journey through "dream-time."

After the dreamer experiences the idea that death is a conductor of life, spewing it back into the world like water-spouts, as feeling, he discovers a great love within himself, reminiscent of Coleridge's mariner. But he finds to his consternation that the human body, or the enclosures of human modes of perception, cannot follow his new-found superior love along "the road." When the dreamer thinks that his body

can travel forward or upward spiritually, his journey stalls: "the body rushes in and ties me up,/ and then goes through the house" -- like a robber. The body cannot be trusted. The new psychic awareness is trapped inside the human; the dreamer feels that one moment he is "on the road, the next instant in the ditch." He is ashamed of his flesh, and the limitations that bind him to the eternal waters of death, and destroy the "dream-time." The dreamer looks once more into his mourning body to discover that same urge to murder and deny the life-principle that he had hoped to subvert in Light and "The Teeth Mother." In Bly's poems the barn is always a symbol of a mid point between the enclosure and the "death outside the death"; as in "Looking," the fish is a symbol of male purity and wisdom:

> Clumsy wings flop around the room,
> I know what I must do,
> I am ashamed looking at the fish in the water.
> The barn doors are open. His first breath touches the
> manger hay
> and the King a hundred miles away
> stands up. He calls his ministers.
> "Find him.
> There cannot be two rulers in one body."
> He sends out wise men along the arteries,
> along the winding tunnels, into the mountains,
> to kill the child in the old moonlit villages of the
> brain.
> (SJH, p. 62)

The dreamer is ashamed of the ascendance and the wisdom he has learned to develop as a poet. He realizes that all aspirations toward spiritual growth are conditioned by cultural residues that lie within the human brain. The intense grief that Bly wrote about in "The Teeth Mother" now becomes palpable, as he reveals his psychic journey, which arrives at the knowledge that poets as well as presidents lie. Where Bly once

reveled in the randomness and wandering of the body, in the poem "Waking from Sleep" (SSF, p. 13), feeling that "navies" set forth freely "Inside the veins," now a darker, frightening aspect of the "wise old man" patrols the arteries.

"Looking into a Face" is gently affirming of the psychic journey entailed by intense communication. "Sleepers" presents the dangers and his own fears, which are the dark side of the journey. His desire to develop his psyche through poetic communication with the larger sphere represents a moral choice. Since the lie is a part of human being, since even poets have within them the capacity to kill a sacred child unjustly, the poet must choose to reach out to a non-human principle of morality. The choice is two-fold: first he must choose to believe in "another world," or to embrace a form of Cartesian dualism in which a "raw" ascetic is paralleled by "a body/ Not yet born," in opposition to a "cooked" culturally conditioned self, which is paralleled by the body who "goes through the house," or what Bly calls the mammal brain. Bly's moral commitment is to maintain and to foster his version of the dualism in American poetry, but as I will show in Chapter 3, Bly is not always comfortable with this commitment.

"Sleepers" presents Bly's imaginative "Night Journey in the Cooking Pot" in such a way that images and themes of his earlier poems are re-evaluated by news of the human. The lack of an ability to feel grief -- to judge the human by the standards of the non-human -- that Bly berated in "The Teeth Mother," as an America failing, in now found within himself. Bly realizes that women are "sobbing in back rooms," and he joins with them:

I fall into my own hands,
fences break down under horses,
cities starve, whole towns of singing women carrying
to the burial fields
the look I saw on my father's face,
I sit down again, I hit my own body,
I shout at my self, and see what I have betrayed.
What I have written is not good enough.
Who does it help?
I am ashamed sitting on the edge of my bed.
(SJH, p. 63)

The language of "Sleepers" gradually opens itself as the actual readers move through the poem. When Bly says that his writing is "not good enough," in terms of his moral commitment, he is saying that he has dwelt too long on the darker principles, at the expense of goodness. When his journey ends with him sitting on his bed, that simple line comes alive as the place of inward travel, grief, and knowledge.

The knowledge so painfully gained is apparently related to a reconciliation between Bly and his father. Bly has written of the great love he had for his father when Bly was growing up.[21] Bly describes his father as "the stone pin that connects this world to the next." In the same place he says: "when you have been unselfish, people respond not in words but by feeding you . . . one moral example will do for a lifetime." Thus, the section that follows "Night Journey" in the poem speaks of a nameless "you" who "feeds the young ravens that call on him." Through an intensely honest attempt at self-searching, Bly arrives at a moment of knowledge of superior morality, contained and astir in the human sphere. The darkness and violence of human being is affirmed in the line "The panther rejoices in the gathering dark." And the poem's audience is characterized in the next, concluding lines (SJH, p. 67), as sleepers or dreamer like Bly, who communicate with

him, finally, from another world in which spatial and temporal laws do not exist: "Hands rush toward each other through miles of space./ All the sleepers in the world join hands."

Bly's method of using his own imaginative inward experience succeeds, as James Mersmann also concludes, only for some readers; the poem is "joyfully lucid to those who can 'read' it and have felt some of the same energy, but an abstruse and hopeless muddle to those who have not."[22] To my mind the poem supplies enough clues to guide the actual reader toward the ultimate experience of sheer joy, which is, I believe, the poem's meaning: how joy can be found in the human sphere regardless of the greater joy of communication with the larger. Two epistemological planes are at work in the poem. One is meant for real readers, and is presented through exempla. The other is meant for an ideal audience implied by the structure and language of the poem. The latter is a communication <u>from</u> the poet <u>to</u> the "psyche larger than anyone living"; on this level the poem is a complaint. But even more than a complaint -- that the human does contain the life-principle -- it is the embodiment of Bly's phrase "a poet to develop must learn to imagine himself." What the ideal audience has gained by the end of the poem is, precisely, Bly's image of himself as a poet. Bly suffers and lives this image; the ideal audience suffers and shares Bly's life.

I have looked at three ways in which Bly makes his closed form of verse answerable to the needs -- as Bly sees them -- of contemporary American literature. Another way exists in which Bly renders his craft answerable to his actual audience; and it has to do with the way he plans his books.

The Invention of an Audience

If Bly believes in imagining, or fictionalizing, himself, and if the image he comes up with is too new, or strange, he must also imagine for himself, or fictionalize his audience. And the invention of an audience becomes in Bly's books an integral part of the writing process. One of the more obvious ways that Bly creates an audience for his craft is through translations and editorship of small books of poetry. The Sea and the Honeycomb: A Book of Poems, and Forty Poems Touching on Recent American History,[23] for example, inject into contemporaneous American culture a poetry of swift, brief emotions -- that makes both poet and reader aware "of feeling they'd hardly noticed before"[24] -- and a dislike for the past 300 years of poets hostile to politics -- the Romanticist aestheticizing of the public word.[25] A less obvious, but more important, way that Bly creates his audience can be seen in the structures of the collections of his own poems.

Can such a practice be considered proper for a "man of letters"? Stranger things have happened in literature; but when Bly's first poetic blast against American mores appeared, critics of contemporary verse divided into two camps. Ekbert Faas, for example, writes that Bly holds the American middle class responsible, in Light, "for our destructive politics and general life style."[26] Faas praises Bly's poems as "able to penetrate into this socio-political unconscious and come back with a truly political poetry which (like Yeats' or Neruda's) transcends the mere versification of political opinions." The opposite opinion holds that Bly failed utterly.[27] To some, the discontinuities of Bly's poetic structures were evidence of a general breakdown in artistic competence, resulting from Bly's horror of the Viet Nam war.

One good argument against Bly's assumption of an audience is that social and political protest poetry never has and never will exist in America. Hence Bly's protest poems cannot succeed as acts of human communication, as Neruda's, for example, do. But if this is indeed the case, Bly's need for an ideal audience is the more poignant.[28] Moreover, Bly had been in search of an audience -- like Neruda's, perhaps, or even like Chaucer's, whom Bly admires -- since his earliest published works. Bly's earliest poems show a strong political and moral commitment.[29] In a sense, the quiet Silence in the Snowy Fields represents a "retreat" from the outward world, to an inward-seeking contemplation of home and countryside: a retreat in which to set up a private ethical base from which to attack more efficiently the moral standards of his country and his age.[30]

The publication of The Light Around the Body coincided with that of a report outlining the proceedings of an international conference of writers, held at Lahti, Finland. At the conference the importance of writers and writing for contemporary culture was debated as "a fireworks display in Hiroshima." Poets were called upon to "Heal the split spirit of the age. Close the gaps. Furnish the 'basic energy for human advance'." The conference might have been speaking of Light and "The Teeth Mother" when it was suggested that "Memory of death's irrational human light has flawed the age, the writer, and the audience, or that hoped-for audience, the people." Writers were called upon to combat "the illusion of unceasing life": the dogmatic assurances of life after death that can become a carte blanche for evil deeds. "What in Christian society, in modern affluent society, has caused men

to underestimate death and evil and the difficulties of spiritual progress toward brotherhood?" The conference even suggested a pessimistic mirror-image of the joyful chorus that concludes "Sleepers Joining Hands": "'there will never be any understanding; people will never meet with outstretched hands, lovingly, united, and as one soul." It would seem since Bly's moral commitment has answered these feelings in his political poems, that Bly's communication with a "psyche larger that anyone living" might have more substance to it than imagination! But to begin to believe in the concept as a reality leads to madness, or poetry. It is enough to assume that Bly's closed communication with the world of the mind's immateriality and sensations creates poems that are responsive to the same context that troubled the Lahti conference. It might be put forward, however, that Bly's invention of an audience is contingent on such thinking as went on at Lahti.[31]

Bly deliberately patterns his books to condition the reader's responses. During the reading process, a reader's responses are subtly modified, poem by poem, so that the reader and the poems are able to "handle experiences of modern life, including war and advertising."[32] Planning of books equips the reader with a "way to approach this experience." Light has a five-part structure, which is designed to guide the reader into a frame of mind in which he may be able to sense the experience described and enacted by "Looking into a Face" and the fifth section of the collection as a whole.

The first section is satirical in tone, and the mood is one of suffocation and oppression. Within these poems of anger towards the power-elite who control the human enclosure, inside the gate, images

of the poor, families, and children -- and small animals -- far outnumber other kinds of images. The anger in the poems helps to characterize the audience of the first section as victims of power and the American economic and political social structure. The second section continues the strategy of "outwardly" writing about presidents and governments, while "inwardly" writing about the poor, families, and children. The audience begins to take shape as it is further characterized as victims of power capable of responding to the poet's invitation: "Come with me into those things that have felt this despair for so long." The third section contains only a few references to the victims; instead the myth of war and war-glory is played against a consistent "groundswell" of images of ghosts and death. The audience is asked to become "at one" with the victims of a contemporary war that calls forth ancient guilts. "Hatred of Men with Black Hair" (LAB, p. 36) ends with a clear allusion to Lorca's "New York (Office and Attack)" in which Lorca says "Beneath all the statistics/ there is a drop of duck's blood."[33] This drop of blood from an animal used by man, like Bly's drop of Indian Blood, justifies an attack on "the conspiring/ of these empty offices/ that will not broadcast the sufferings."

In the first three sections of Light an audience has been progressively implied as both victimized and able to become at one with the poet in appreciating the disturbing implications of as polarized a society as the America the book describes. This audience is in need of atonement, which will help them heal their failed perceptions, and see the wrongdoing: "Give us a glimpse of what we cannot see,/ Our enemies, the soldiers and the poor" (LAB, p. 33).

The fourth section begins with a motto taken from Boehme -- the Lutheran mystic supplies all of the mottos of both Light and Silence -- which states that man's eternal bond with death is yet "our life, for it nourishes and brings us up" (LAB, p. 39). The poems of the fourth section ask the reader to once more share the poet's personal experience. Now the poor are offered "food" -- nourishment of death and honestly and deeply felt grief -- as a sacramental and symbolical resolution of their needs. The victims are counselled not to understand the wisdom of "The ancient worms eating up the sky" -- skyscrapers -- the "ghost crabs" moving under earth -- sullen, silent, inward strength -- for "No one in business can be a Christian/ The two worlds are both in this world" (LAB, p. 43). Coffins, caskets, death, and grief continue through the fifth and last section, as the symbolic resolution of death and grief as "food" is expressed in action, and the audience, the "we" Bly addresses grows calm, sailing "on into the tunnels of joyful death." The ideal audience, along with the poet, are "Moving Inward at Last." In the fifth section the poet speaks confidently as one who has won -- or created -- his audience: "The poor, and the dazed, and the idiots/ Are with us, they live in the casket of the sun/ And the moon's coffin" (LAB, p. 54). The final part of Light brings both evolution and historical time in on the side of the audience, the "we." Characterizing the communication between the poet and his audience as containing both time and space (LAB, pp. 61 and 62), the poems move toward a ground of authority, or sanctification, necessary to Bly's moral commitment. The collection ends with a paraphrase of a saying in the Tau Te Ching -- 'those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know' -- which further characterizes the audience as

having the wisdom of the ancients. The victims are affirmed in their anonymity, because their poet has touched a ground of non-human truth with is silent:

> We cannot see --
> But a paw
> Comes out of the dark
> To light the road. Suddenly I am flying,
> I follow my own fiery traces through the night!
> (LAB, p. 60)

By the time the ideal reader reaches the end of the collection, he is characterized by being beyond space and time, as being a victim of power who nevertheless contains a superior wisdom, as having tasted the sacramental "food" of grief and death, and as at one with the poet in "a road" lighted by a higher morality.

An analysis of Silence and Sleepers betrays a similar strategy of patterning the reader's expectations in such a way as to lead him along the road followed by the poet's communications with the larger sphere. Sleepers, as Mersmann says, can seem annoyingly muddled yet "lucid to those who can 'read' it." In Bly's first collection, Silence, deliberate patterning is most obvious; in the second, Light, a little less so; and in the third, Sleepers, the patterning is not obvious. In subsequent books, the sort of patterning I am describing seems less important to Bly. These facts argue that Bly has gradually assured himself of his place in the ideal company with which he would communicate to develop as a poet.

Bly's first collection -- not counting "The Ascension of J.P. Morgan," that no one would print -- can be thought of as a circle, followed by a rising-hesitation-point-and-falling pattern, followed

by a pattern of forward movement through time and space. The first section of Silence is cyclical, roughly following a seasonal sequence, in which both solstices are placed in the middle. The pronoun "I" appears rarely. The second section is pivotal like the first; but "I" outnumbers "we" after the thirteenth, pivotal poem "Depression" (SSF, p. 37). Images of singing, calling, listening, explosions, bird's speech, "ears" of corn dominate the first section and impress the communication theme. These images recede after "Depression,' to be replaced by images of seeing. The poem "Images Suggested by Medieval Music" (SSF, p. 44) expresses the idea of seeing surreally as a kind of music with the immateriality and sensations of the mind, in which imagined objects take on disturbing reality. In the final section, "Silence in the Roads," the seeing imagery expresses inward life and knowledge, which theme -- exactly half-way through this section -- is overcome by five poems expressing a community and friendship between the poet and his audience. Once again, the strategy of inventing an audience is obvious in Silence.

In Silence the poet describes his audience as capable of understanding experiences of solitude and a love for home and community. Most people can respond to such themes. However, in the second section of the book, the poet "awakens" to find that "we" -- as a totality -- are approaching sleep: "the chestnut blossoms in the mind/ Mingle with thoughts of pain" (SSF, p. 26). Bly describes these thoughts of pain in poems that are somewhat more difficult for the actual readers to respond to. He rejects the "answers" offered by traditional Christianity (SSF, p. 34); however, when Bly contemplates the sea for an answer to his "awakening" discontent, his is saddened to discover only that the

sea, or the inward road, offers answers that are always transient, and consequently sad: "for though on its road the body cannot march/ With golden trumpets -- it must march --/ And the sea gives up its answer as it falls into itself" (SSF, p. 35). The "fall" is described in personal terms by the two poems following "On the Ferry Across Chesapeak Bay," the fine poem from which I have just quoted. In "A Man Writes to a Part of Himself" (SSF, p. 36) -- an unacknowledged paraphrase of the Old English elegy "The Wife's Lament" -- the poet coverty confesses that he writes to a part of himself, and in "Depression" (SSF, p. 37), he sees the dark side of his strategy as a poet, and sees himself: "My body was sour, my life dishonest, and I fell asleep."

As the poet recovers, finding affirmation in small things -- and small poems -- he sees that his affirmation can be found in "'Taking the Hands'" of a loved one. Though Bly looks up angrily at light, the main Christian symbol of affirmation, he hears "Tiny birds . . . in the deep valleys of the hand."

The final section embarks on a motif of forward movement that affirms not only a spiritual authority the poet discovered while driving around the silent streets of a mid-western town on a cold and snowy night, but a ground of authority that comes into the poems through the communication between the poet and his ideal audience:

> We know the road; as the moonlight
> Lifts everything, so on a night like this
> The road goes on ahead, it is all clear.
> (SSF, p. 51)

Sleepers Joining Hands follows the same basic strategy as Silence, with the difference that the middle section of Sleepers becomes a

public statement intended to define the psychic totality of the American people, as Bly conceives of it. The purpose of the middle section of Silence may be thought of as the poet's humbling himself before the higher morality of the "psyche larger that anyone living." The purpose of the prose essay -- speculations derived from the Jungian scholar Erich Neuman's The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, Princeton, 1955 -- is to present Bly's perception of the cultural residues lying inside human consciousness, so that the poet can communicate with the ideal audience the more effectively. Bly's "thought of pain" are given a wider applicability when couched within the context of the essay. Only Bly's treatment of the ideas in the essay is original. Robert Graves's The White Goddess is the immediate predecessor of the essay. However, the middle sections of both collections can be described as "doors" that the actual reader may peer through. If the reader chooses to try to follow the path of the ideal audience, he must, in a sense, allow himself to be fictionalized by his responses to the books during the reading process. The actual reader becomes visible as a character in the fictional world created by the closed, dramatic communications between Bly and his ideal audience. Bly published a translation of a poem by Tomas Tranströmmer in a broadsheet simultaneously with Sleepers. In this poem there is a stanza that nicely describes intended effect of the middles of Silence and Sleepers: "I open door number two./ Friends! You drank some darkness/ and became visible."[34] The same poem also describes the significance of the third sections of the two collections, in that experience -- of confidence in "the road," and "our" poet's struggle with his duality -- is offered to those who can share it: "Door

number three. A narrow hotel room./ View on the alley./ One lamppost shines on the asphalt./ Experience, its beautiful slag." In these lines the idea that experience, rendered in poetry, becomes a momentary raid on meaninglessness, and that it is the endeavour that counts, not the slag of words left behind.

Through a consciousness of some being listening inside his poems, or inside his poetic processes, Bly renders the overall structures of his books answerable to that awareness. In this sense the books invent their own audience. And this is the reason why Bly states that "the question of audience is irrelevant." Bly refuses to prostitute himself, as he puts it, to a large audience of actual poetry-readers in America, because, to refuse is "a kind of honor."[35] But Bly's image of a poet -- needed by contemporary America -- is one who creates for himself "an instrument of knowledge, a poem, responsive entirely to the imagination. Poetry's purpose in growing is to advance deeper into the unknown country" -- leaving behind a slag of aesthetic work. The poet must commit himself, as Bly said in 1958, as T.S. Eliot did in The Waste Land, to do his best to break down the irresponsible literary establishements that arose in the decades following Eliot's "raiding" of the modern world. "Modern in the profound sense," in which "the imagination and terror are [not] dimmed by the conventional iambic line."[36]

The ideal audience Bly addresses gives to his poems their recalcitrant feel; yet the poems are aesthetic products making an intense effort to "move inward" to the imagination and the terror. Bly has said that Machado was the primary inspiration behind Silence in the

Snowy Fields. Machado's concept of the poet's audience is illuminating in comparison with Bly's. To Machado the poet must write for and to the people, the pueblo, and never to the masses. In Machado's idealistic form of Marxism, a poet who has a large audience is bourgeois; Machado's and Bly's attitudes toward the middle class coincide. Machado wrote in the 1930's: "If you address yourself to the masses, then the man -- the Everyman -- who hears you will not feel that it is he whom you address."[37]

Bly's decision to address an ideal audience who receives each poem as the poet conceives of it is a moral one. More than enabling him to write social and political protest verse in a complacent society, the choice allows him to reach those Everymen who are "trapped in the traditional modes of learning of a traditional society . . . condemned to repeat the pattern of their species."[38] Bly writes about Ibsen that he was convinced "that betrayal was a cornerstone of European civilization . . . the entire 'system as he [Ibsen] called it was about to fall. Political reformers merely delayed the fall . . . don't push chessmen, 'Turn the whole board over'."[39] Bly's play, "The Satisfaction of Viet Nam," reads like a gloss on the more esoteric of Bly's political poems, particularly "The Teeth Mother"; but in the form the play corresponds to modern French drama, and Beckett.[40] Bly's play shares with the French playwrights a commitment to confounding the complacent by means of a program of unsettling answers and questions. Comtemporary French drama presents a modern hell of violence, betrayal, and despair as "metaphors for man's metaphysical state."[41] The European dramatic writer must assume a "complexity of his fraternity," and a "multiple and conflicting responsiblity."

Bly's moral commitment -- explicit in "Satisfaction" -- is akin to the French playwrights' responsibility, and his choice of an ideal audience is akin to their idea of fraternity.

Nevertheless, the concept of an ideal audience is a slippery one. In a final attempt to characterize it, I will quote once more from Machado:

> Is there some sincere communion among men, that would permit us to sing a chorus, animated by the same feelings? With this question the problem of a communist lyric . . . begins. To solve it one must seek out the metaphysical foundations on which this lyric is based -- a philosophical belief, since religious faith seems a difficult thing in our time. It would be necessary to believe: first, that there exists an other person, a plurality of spirits, other purely intimate beings like ourselves; second, that these spirits are not closed monads, incommunicable and self-sufficient, multiple solitudes that sing and listen to themselves only; third, that there exists a spiritual reality which transcends individual souls, and in which the latter can share.[42]

Bly is committed to the belief that betrayal is the cornerstone of each individual soul. "Depression," and "Sleepers" express the belief. However, he also feels that to transcend it is to leave all that is human behind; and "Looking into a Face" expresses this, while "Sleepers" complains against it. Thus Bly's commitment to a superior morality is also a moral dilemma: a painful duality of longings. This duality is the source of the intensity that glues his poems together as contiguous metonymies. His communications with his ideal audience can be listened to second-hand; but you and I can follow the path of this communication a little farther by examining the sacral dimensions of Bly's commitment.

Chapter 2

THE SACRAL FACET

Robert Bly's poetry answers to the moral consciousness of his ideal audience through morally determined strategies. Though critics felt that Bly recoiled from the harshness of reality -- that his political poems were defensive, that his faith was reticent -- they gradually came to see, as Charles Molesworth says, "an unfolding, even clarifying, pattern to Bly's career."[1] Bly's prose poems have not been adequately discussed in the terms of Bly's work as a whole; this chapter examines the religious implications of the prose poems as elements of the sacral facet of his commitment to poetry.

I will develop a model of Bly's sacral commitment through the adaptation of a vocabulary normally used to describe religious experiences. This vocabulary, combined with the thesis that Bly's prose poems, like mystical writing in general, are a form of religious autobiography, will make the prose poems accessible to religious, or mystical, interpretation. The spiritual record that the prose poems present is complementary to the moral record of the poems of social and political content. Bly's sacral commitment is answerable to the same "psyche larger that anyone living," the same "plurality of spirits," in Machado's phrase, as are the political poems. However, in this chapter the ideal audience is ascribed the further characteristic

of ineffability. This conciousness of ineffability is, in the prose poems, a transient experience, which, once tasted by the poet, goads him on to seek a more satisfying unity between feeling, thought, and longing that is transcendent over the rational intellect.

My model for the sacral content of Bly's prose poems is more complicated by conflicting sets of terms than it is elaborate. The reason for this is that the content of the prose poems draws upon a host of religious and mystical ideas, concepts, and "archetypes." Thus religious syncretism is one of the major aspects of the model. Another important aspect is Bly's duality, which has been discussed to some extent in the previous chapter, and which is again discussed in Chapter 3. Another extremely important aspect of the model is the mystical writings of Jacob Boehme; yet another is the American Puritan streak that cuts through Bly's attitudes and ideas. The mottos to the prose essay in Sleepers will give an idea of Bly's audaciously syncretistic relationship with sacred documents:

> All around me men are working,
> but I am stubborn, and take no part.
> The main difference is this:
> I prize the breasts of the Mother.
>
> TAO TE CHING
>
> I came out of the Mother naked,
> and I will be naked when I return.
> The Mother gave, and the Mother takes away,
> I love the Mother.
>
> OLD TESTAMENT, restored
>
> (SJH, p. 27)

Methodologically, there is a hint of Robert Graves's The Nazarene Gospel Restored in the mottos; and the content hints of Norman O. Brown. To Bly, the principle of eternal feminine fecundity is not

merely a concept, but a form of consciousness to be sought after, and honoured. In his way of life -- that may not be mistaken for a style -- the seeking of non-human consciousness determines the form and content of his poetry. Thus Bly describes his discontinuous style as a form of content. The ancient wisdom of sacred texts, such as the Tao Te Ching, is applied to Bly's way of life because it is closer to the time before human beings began to re-arrange their perceptions of the reality Bly is convinced comprises "two worlds."[2] The poem "After Long Busyness" is made clear when read with these ideas in mind:

> I start out for a walk at last after weeks at the desk.
> Moon gone, plowing underfoot, no stars; not a trace of light!
> Suppose a horse were galloping toward me in this open field?
> Every day I did not spend in solitude was wasted.[3]

This poem was written after Bly had realized that his protests against the Viet Nam war were futile.

The Two Worlds

James F. Mersmann maintains that Silence, Light, and Sleepers, together represent Bly's progress as a poet and mystic of the way, through a "familiar classical pattern of innocence, experience, and wisdom (recovered innocence illuminated by experience)."[4] I do not know what "classical" pattern Mersmann has in mind; but if he is thinking of Blake, Bly's comments on Blakean innocence and experience might be worth noting:

> Blake is such an amazing poet because he talks of moving from one brain to another. His people in the state of experience, after all, have been pulled back into the

> reptile brain . . . When we are in a state of innocence, Blake says we are feeling some of the spiritual ecstacy of the new brain.[5]

Bly's interest in Blake is deeper than this quotation suggests (what he means here is that in experience one cares only for survival, but in innocence one's consciousness feeds on "wild spiritual ideas," and that it is "amazing" that Blake could break through the reptilian Eighteenth century to see this). In the terms of Bly's rendition of Neumann's concept of the four mothers, the nurses of Blake's two "Nurse's Songs" are the Ecstatic Mother (innocence), and the Stone Mother (experience). The poem "A Windy December Night" clears with these ideas in mind:

> There is a connection between the feminine and this
> windy December night.
> "Do not be frightened, children!"
> But the birds have eaten the womb-shaped seeds
> we dropped in the moonlight.
> When the salmon dives, it comes up carrying
> a sack of wedding rings!
> This love is like the sun held inside a tiny solar
> system,
> like the moon kept in a pouch.
> "Come in, do not be frightened, children!"
> Some of us will die,
> others will lengthen out years on islands,
> but this night blows against hubcaps.
> Men will die for this night.
> (JOB)

"The Stone Mother stands for numbness, paralysis, catatonia . . . America's fate is to face this Mother before other industrial nations" (SJH, p. 41). Birds eat and destroy the life-principle because they ascend, and ascension, for Bly, is masculine. But pure masculine wisdom, the salmon, enables the spiritually ambitious a marriage with the non-human (unlike Graves's goddess, Bly's mothers are never "all

too human").

Mersmann defines Bly's poetry as expressive of mystical experience, and like Michael Atkinson,[6] discusses this experience in terms of "archetypes" and Jungian individuation. There are, however, significant differences between what depth psychologists called "individuation" and what students of sacred writings call "mystical experience." Individuation is basically a clinical procedure through which a skilled analyst aids imbalanced, disturbed, or maladjusted patients realize their potentially satisfactory relationships with society. The Self is an abstraction from this procedure; in the analyst's hands, the Self is an ideal toward which he urges his patient. A patient's communication with his dreams, or the Self, is not unlike Bly's with his ideal audience. The Jungian Self is a totality of the body and the psyche. The person, the individual being as contrasted with other persons, objects, and ideas existing outside of the Self, is not itself a goal, or object, to be striven after. As an abstraction from that goal, the Self enters into metaphysical, philosophical, and religious regions. The goal that is striven after is Identity: an individual's awareness of the continuity between his own experience of his existence, and the style in which he expresses his awareness. Individuation, as a kind of personality development, properly belongs in the region of ethics and morality, for ethical choices make the man. In other words, the Jungian Self is an "archetypal image" of the soul. In the lives of mystics, the soul, or Self, gradually diminishes to the point of extinction, as the mystic grows closer to the ineffable presence of God. The psychical dynamics of Individuation and mysticism are contraries of each other.

Individuation and mysticism are often used as co-extensive terms

for dealing with the particulars of experience communicated by Bly's poetry; Jung, Whitman, D.H. Lawrence, and Snyder are just as often used as counters, to set up a general context.[7] At times Bly's poems are discussed in terms of a "poetics of mystical individuation"![8] Revaluation of terms used to describe poetry of a religious nature seems advisable. In Chapter 3 I will be dealing with the maturation of Bly's poetics; in Chapter 1 I dealt, in part, with the development of the poet's personality as expressed through the concept of an ideal audience. In this chapter I am concerned with growth of the soul -- or Self. My model of Bly's sacral commitment draws terms from the writings of "established" mystics, such as Boehme, and from Max Westbrook's concept of "American Sacrality." I choose to work with the prose poems because they have been neglected and because the sacral facet showing most clearly through them. My texts are: The Morning Glory (1969-1975) and This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood (1977).[9]

In part, mysticism represents a portion of reality that can be perceived but not rendered in language: it "makes itself manifest" like bubbles behind a boat. If Wittgenstein's mystical aesthetics makes it impossible for literary critics to know "how well a given work of art manages to represent the world," it should be more difficult to know how well supposedly mystical writings represent mystical experience. James R. Horne's "How to Describe Mystical Experiences" comes up against this problem of ineffability.[10] Descriptions of mystical experiences are like dream-reports: there is no way of knowing if the dreamer really dreamed the dream. As we must contextualize dream-reports with facial expressions, knowledge of the person, and so forth, so we must take into

account the mystic's habits, manners, the stages of his life, the nature of his writings. Not all mystics' lives follow the same pattern, however. "There is something irreducably subjective at the heart of a description of mystical experience." Since mystics recognize the validity of other mystics' reports, Mr. Horne suggests a concept of "transsubjectivity" to help deal with such elite understandings. Bly recognizes a great many mystical reports as having value in his way of life; Boehme and the Indian Moslem Kabir are two of them.

The stages of a mystic's life are dynamic. He moves through a process of paring away the Self, in order to better experience God's immanence, and returns to join in his trans-subjective company. F.C. Happold's handbook, Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology,[11] studies mystical writings from around the world down through the ages, and supplies the necessary vocabulary for dealing with an attitude toward sacrality as syncretist as Bly's. Happold draws three major stations in a mystic's life: the initial Purgation of Soul, leading to the Illuminative Life, or Contemplation, which leads -- rarely -- to the Unitive Life. This final stage is characterized by the absorption of the Self into the sacredness and sanctity of all things, or the ineffable. The fourth stage is the return: what Happold calls "mysticism of action," or what Mersmann calls simply "the return." Happold's schemata resembles that of Radhakrishnan's: Purification, Concentration, and Identification. Bly's prose poems may be considered to express the experience of the middle stage of the Illuminative Life, Contemplation, or Concentration. Before this model is put to the test, I will add a few specifically American twists on the Protestant American

mystical tradition in order to better approach the Lutheran Norwegian immigrant streak in Bly's work.

Westbrook nicely delineates the fundamental problems that Americans have traditionally faced in matters of practicality and spirituality.[12] To Westbrook, the spirituality of Robert Bly is akin to that of other Americans from Jonathan Edwards forward. Incidentally, Westbrook's essay claims D.H. Lawrence as an American, at least implicitly. The tradition to which Westbrook believes Bly offers healthy promise for the future includes Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, Emily Dickenson, W.C. Williams, and many others. This tradition expresses a dialectic, evolving through history and literature, between practical and spiritual values, which is passed down to the American people and made manifest there in ways of making a living, ways of life, and so forth. "In practice our devotion to the spiritual may come closer to betrayal than to devotion; but our most characteristic values . . . suggest a faith in some reality more permanent than . . . the temporal world." Bly's "Depression" is a good illustration of this idea. America associates a desire for spiritual values with impracticality, the unrealistic, the romantic "flight out of time." Practicality has become the great establishment value. Napalm, for example, is an extremely efficient labour-saving device. Bly's "The Teeth Mother" attempts to express the horror implicit in this aspect. Cyclical time, continuity of life, and a search for origins are the three main themes of concept American sacrality.

Westbrook rightly adds to his system an idea derived from D.H. Lawrence:

> Basically, sacrality is a belief in God as energy. The powers that thrive in man and in the universe -- the good, the evil, the indifferent -- are thought to be the original energies which founded the world . . . as a power more fundamental than ethics or the intellect. Once the primacy of sacred energies is granted, the way is cleared for man to bring into full play his local and country values . . . Affirmation consists primarily in the belief that a Godly energy can be touched again . . . at any time.

And so with Bly: his liking for "the wisdom of the ancients," continuities between present experience and history, and the seasons -- rarely absent from his poems -- are all means by which he grants primacy to "sacred energies." In Westbrook's terms Bly's duality can be thought of as a dilemma between temporal practicalities and primordial energies, between a moral and sacral commitment. The facets of Bly's commitment to his craft may reflect one light, but the colours are different, and sometimes clash. Bly has never been one to be afraid to go outside of American traditions for ideas that may help to unify the experiences of his poetic way of life.

Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) has been one of the major spiritual influences on Bly. For Boehme "the external world of independent origin is . . . extraneous to human destiny."[13] There can exist no freedom or will outside of human destiny, which is to live in obedience with God. When Bly cites Boehme to the effect that "we are all asleep in the outward man," he denies the existence of practical freedom of choice. Bly's moral choice to communicate with the larger sphere is commitment in the sense of obedience. All freedom is for Boehme generated out of the eternal will, the unseeing eye, or mirror, that exists only outside of nature. The first world in Boehme's system is the Father, Darkness,

or Wrath. The World of Wrath and Darkness desires; it desires to manifest itself -- is other-directed -- and hence creates the Son, Light, or Love. The World of Light and Love is the second world. This world, our world, the world of practicality and real readers -- this is a third world. So when Bly speaks about the other world, provided he is being true to Boehme, he is speaking the first two worlds that exist in a dynamic and creative flux within the creative, mystical, and inward-gazing man.

The "two worlds" exist in what Boehme calls the Ungrund, which corresponds to the Freudian "unconscious": "the essence of the external world has proceeded from the internal, viz. from the imagination or desire of the internal world." The mystic -- and the poet to develop as a poet -- must learn to take part in the correct and obedient Love of the Son, or Heart. The Son's Love goes back again toward the Father just as a child might take nothingness, or being out of nature, as the first object of his love. "And on the other part of life proceeds death, and death must therefore be the cause of life." This was the message to the victims of Light, described in the previous chapter.

Selfishness, vanity, hubris, these are the symptoms of a dying soul; the soul dies when it is capable only of self-love. Correct identification with the World of Darkness and Wrath transforms self-love into "gentleness." Like a poet, or an image of a poet, the Ungrund generates objects out of itself, opposites emerge to actualize the pious soul, the divine in men requires a return to the Will of the Father, and freedom is the result of inner conflict. Bly takes these ideas into his poetry, which partly explains why his surreal images are deliberately conflicting, and why he holds on to his duality while at the same time

longs for unity. For Bly, the dilemma of practicality and sacrality is an inward one; nature, which includes man, is entirely human in Boehme's system, because nature proceeds from man's unconscious. What is human can exist only on the nether side of the Ungrund. This is why "we are all asleep in the outward world." To awaken is to perceive, in a unity of feeling, thought, and joy, and to experience transient moments of being beyond the duality of life and death. To awaken is obedience; obedience is to awaken. In a manner analogous to the closed, dramatic communications described in the last chapter, the "two worlds" is a creative flux that desires to manifest itself in objects. The third world, our world of practical concerns, is the mere reflection of the interaction between the Son and the Father, just as our habits of reading are mere reflections of the creative process that leaves behind "its beautiful slag." Thus, when the actual reader reads one of Bly's prose poems, he may expect that the descriptions of the natural world he finds there are "really" descriptions of the poet's unconscious creativity engendered by the writing process. If the reader -- you or I -- were to sit beside Mr. Bly while he was in the process of conceiving "The Hockey Poem" (MG, p. 14), chances are that we would see a very different game than Bly. For Bly, the Love that returns obediently to the Father can also be thought of as the love a child returns to his mother. Boehme makes the same analogy. Add to this Bly's regard for the Great Mother, and what Bly sees and records in poetry are goalies who wear masks of the Great Mother, calling her children inward back to the right path, and a black puck: duality emerged to actualize the pious soul.

Bly's sacral commitment includes various diverse elements, such as a widely ranging syncretism, Wordsworthian Romanticism, Rilke, Kabir. I will discuss some of these elements below, in my treatment of Camphor, in which a further characteristic of the ideal audience is examined. For the moement I will say only that in the sense that "All the sleepers in the world join hands," in the prose poems, Bly's audience is already "with him," moving forward on the road that leads to sacred energies united in the Darkness, the "death outside the death." However, such poems involve the moral dilemma of being answerable to the needs of the lesser sphere. How can a poetry of the inner world, or worlds, heal and integrate? Is it not a betrayal? The "two worlds" may offer a poet divine knowledge, but such mystical experience is always transient. When the ecstacy passes the mystic, or the poet, is left alone with shame:

> I shout at myself, I see what I have betrayed.
> What I have written is not good enough.
> Who does it help?
> I am ashamed sitting on the edge of my bed.
> (SJH, p. 63)

Answering a Call from the Other World

Twelve poems of the first section of Morning Glory were published privately in 1969, and another eight were added to a 1970 pamphlet. Four more, including "The Hockey Poem" (1974), were added to the final edition of 1975. The first eight poems of Morning Glory I each deal with the relationship between the sacredness of the non-human, or obedient, lives of things, places, and animals, and the profane nature of "human dullness." One side of the duality is not elevated over the

other; the poems present contemplations at a juncture of the sacred and the profane. Bly is morally obligated to maintain his poetry at this juncture, for to rise does not help, and to fall is disobedience. Religious language is conspicuous in these eight poems. Rocks, a dead wren, the sea, trout-fingerlings, and children are recorded as being "immense reserves of pure energy." Characteristically, Bly chooses to concentrate on a dead bird -- compare the "Clumsy wings" of "Sleepers" (SJH, p. 62), and the destructive birds of "A Windy December Night" (JOB) -- because of his distrust of the "males ascending" traditions of "post-matriarchal" civilization. Bly identifies with an octopus, who longed to "go home," in such a way that the beast, being "not understood, illiterate," becomes an emblem of the poet "transformed" by the "wise old man" -- a Japanese fisherman -- and hence obligated to forget the Love that longs to return. Affirming the sacredness of privacy and secrecy, Bly visits the seaboard, and "Looking into a Tide Pool" (MG, p. 12), he concentrates on "asking nothing." Sadness is the mood that overcomes the poet, as he contemplates his dilemma:

> On the surface the noduled seaweed, lying like hands,
> slowly drawing back and returning, hands laid on
> fevered bodies, moving back and forth, as the healer
> sings wildly, shouting to Jesus and his mother.

The ninth, tenth, and eleventh poems contemplate human beings interacting with the divine energies as they enter our mundane lives and pastimes. These are followed by a contemplation of the creative imagination (MG, p. 19), and death (MG, p. 20), and "another world" (MG, p. 21). These contemplations allow the poet to "rear" out of "the bottom" of things -- death and illusions of domesticity -- to an

intense experience of what can only be called the One-in-All-and-All-in-One:

> It rushes everywhere in front of me . . . And my sleeping senses are shouted at, called in from the back of my head, to look at it! Well, it is only a broken-off bush, a tumbleweed, every branch different, and the whole bush the same . . .
> (MG, p. 22)

The image presents dramatically the Buddhist concept of the Void. We can say that the poet is being called upon by his ideal audience to use his perceptions, and that the image constitutes a communication between the poet and the ideal audience. The model helps us understand a little of the power and meaning of the communication, even if we are not mystics enough to feel and share the experience. An experience of the Illuminative Life has touched upon the Unity, but it passes; a feeling of love for the sea, the mother of all life, remains. The last nine poems of Morning Glory's first section return to the "more complicated roads," the roads that the poet follows along with the human community, despite his longing to "go home." At one point (MG, p. 30), Bly actually delivers a prescriptive sermon on the ways by which the human community can try to partake of the "two worlds" inside our lesser one.

"The Point Reyes Poems," Morning Glory II, was first published as a pamphlet in 1974. The arrangement of the pamphlet describes a movement from sea and shore to hill and inland forest, back again to the sea. The rearranged pattern in the final edition is more complex. The section begins with a contemplation of the secret life-principle within human being, that life that longs to return to the Father of Wrath

and Darkness. This theme is carried on through the next poem (MG, p. 40), which is a contemplation of the love that non-human things can have for small animals and children: "whatever lives without force." Boehme's mother and child analogy is interpreted in terms of evolution; and the mare-Mary theme continues into the third poem of the second section of the collection. The next poem concentrates on the Oedipal feelings of a young child, and develops the contemplation into verse speculations upon the origins of disobedience in human lives, which are followed by a poem that contemplates the immanence of sacredness in the outward world. In this poem sea lions, rising from the sea on a Sunday morning, become metaphors for Christ rising from his manger (MG, p. 45). This leads in turn to a contemplation of death as the source of life, which is close to being Illuminative in that the sea, a plane coming for a landing, and an old woman are images of the "mingling after death," or the silence, awe and beauty of the beyond. In the next poem (MG, pp. 48-49), Bly makes "a kind of pulpit" of his hand, which a salamander mounts to "preach" to the poet a lesson on the nature of war and human perception that is blocked from knowing the higher morality of small animals by the vanity of traditional modes of perception. The poet then goes on to concentrate on ecstatic awareness in a poem that recalls some of the vocabulary of the unconscious developed in the prose interlude of Sleepers. A kind of orderliness characterizes the way in which the arrangement of the final edition moves toward the last two poems. It is the orderliness of life that Happold and Horne believe is an important feature of the mystical way. Such orderliness enables the mystic to increase the frequency of his illuminations.

The dying seal of the second to last poem in the section cries out to Bly "like the cries from Christmas toys." The poem previous to this one expresses a desire for ecstatic consciousness, and its ability to unearth "years that are still down there below the chest." The Unitive Life that the poet longs for in these poems is here sensed to be out of reach; too many human things block the poet from the creative flux of the Ungrund. Morally and honourably, Bly concedes his separateness from the noble, non-human death of the beast: "goodbye brother, die in the sound of waves, forgive us if we have killed you." "The Point Reyes Poems" are all affirming expressions of religious concentrations on the immanence of sacrality in nature, and of religious longing for experience of that immanence. But human intellectual vanity, which can plague even a child blocks man's perceptions. Throughout the section, however, there are moments when a communication between the poet and the "two world" seems just beyond his grasp. This is one of the main differences between the prose poem and the lined poems: in the best of the lined poems a communication is achieved and the poem is closed, but in the prose poems the actual reader may witness the struggle, the dilemma, of the poet before that stage is reached -- but perhaps this makes the prose poems more enjoyable as literature. "Sunday Morning at Tomales Bay" (MG, pp. 45-46), the Christ manger poem, might be considered as expressing a moment's imminence of sacrality, which becomes "fogged" as the poet's attention is drawn back to the shore, and is lost as "the Great Blue Heron flies away thin as a grass-blade in the fog." This image is a good example of what Bly is trying to describe: glimpses of the invisible appearing transiently in the

outward world, only to become invisible again. The dead seal poem (MG, pp. 52-54) is affirmative despite the theme of failure and transiency that runs throughout The Morning Glory, and that is particularly forceful in this poem because of the strain Bly feels between his desire and his capacities.

The way of life described by The Morning Glory does make some progress, however. In that the book describes the way of life -- not to be mistaken for a style -- that he uses to imagine himself to develop as a poet, and so forth, it is a form of religious autobiography which may assume a complementary status beside a study of Bly's poetic porcesses. Also, it sheds light of his moral commitment, and helps to further characterize his ideal reader -- but I am anticipating myself. The way of life described is one of feeling, seeing, and a considerable amount of thinking about personal experience as a ground of spiritual authority. The recorded experience is that of longing for a piercing through nature to sacral unity in the unconscious source of nature. The failure of "looking into a Tide Pool" (MG, p. 12) is more final than the failure of "The Dead Seal near McClure's Beach" (MG, pp. 52-54). In the former the poet falls back on traditional Christian objects of devotion. In the latter he manages to take away from his experience of teh separateness between himself and the beast's death a sense of "the pure death": a death that is inviolable, and cannot be "touched" by Bly, by man, or by human modes of perception, by selfish modes. A degree of certainty has been won, which leads to the unsuccessful affirmation of the final poem of the second section of the collection.

"The Large Starfish" (MG, pp. 55-56) begins like this:

> It is a low tide. I have climbed down the cliffs from Pierce Ranch to the tide pools. Now the ecstacy of the low tide, kneeling down, alone.

The rearrangement can now be seen as a deliberate patterning of the reader's responses; by this point in the collection the simple diction of the poem is alive with resonances of previous poems. A low tide flowing out to the sea, flows toward "the mingling after death"; the descending motif means that the poet is "moving inward at last"; the name "Pierce Ranch" has obvious connotations. The time has come for the poet to communicate, through ecstacy, with the "two worlds." Bly goes on to develop the image of the starfish's fingers moving "up the groin of the rock . . . then back down"; in such a way, the healing hands of "Looking into a Tide Pool" are recalled, and the difference made clear. The ecstacy of the starfish and the rock at low tide is recorded as "delicate brown weeds" that float "marvelously." When the human hand reaches out to the starfish, the fish "holds on firmly, and then slowly relaxes . . . I suddenly take an arm and lift it.":

> thousands of tiny tubes begin rising from all over the underside . . . hundreds in the mouth, hundreds along the nineteen underarms . . . all looking . . . feeling . . . like a man looking for a woman . . . tiny heads blindly feeling for a rock and finding only air.

The movement of the starfish is likened to an act of love; but it is a love totally separated from the human sphere. Nevertheless, the prose renders a sense of gentleness and trust, and communication, between man and beast. The poet's "spiritual curiosity" forces him to

pierce through the watery barriers, and when he does he is welcomed. "Probably," he realizes, the looking, feeling, tiny heads are "its moving-feet." The action of love in the sphere beyond selfish human perceptions, like the action of consciousness, is a unity, and the poet replaces the fish in its element. This action parallels his refusal to remove the death of the seal to his own human element. The sense of "pure death" is now completed by a sense of pure life; both are accessible to Bly as he allows himself to become aware of the Love that is unconcerned with the Self. This is the secret that lies within the outward world, and Bly's introductory note to the collection makes it explicit: "When we first sense that a pine tree really doesn't need us, that it has a physical life and a moral life and a spiritual life that is complete without us, we feel alienated and depressed. The second time we feel it, we feel joyful" (MG, p. xii). A degree of certainty, ecstacy, and joy has been reached. By the end of the third section, a little more progress is made.

Morning Glory III is constituted of eleven poems. The first eight are contemplations of the dilemma between sacrality and practicality. The first poem speaks of smog as having an immanent life, or "ectoplasm," of its own. But there is terror in the poet's way of life; carrying his new found certainty that his perceptions can "pierce," he descends in a helicopter to a city, and, aware that death-in-life comes "from the medium now," he senses anguish as "the dead move around." Briefly, the wind -- ancient symbol of inspiration -- becomes sacramental to a male animal who ascends only to be found "with little spontaneity," "expressionless," having forgotten "any

stories he had heard" (MG, p. 60). This is followed by a poem about an old poet; both animal and poet are described in terms of machinery, as the poet "descends" into the city, from the rural landscape of the first two sections. Bly's idea of masculine ascendence, of saintliness and asceticism, is rejected in favour of "a few green blades entirely underwater, joy of a man who has lived"; cities, orthodox religion, "males ascending," and machinery are contrasted with souls that have "missing parts," femininity, daily living by the sea that is "half soul and half body," and "thoughts that can save," in a poem about a farm and the history of farming in America (MG, pp. 65-66). The next, sixth poem is a contemplation of the "ferocious" summer's passing, which rings a note of failure, but prepares the poet for a gentle orderliness of daily work. The seventh poem gives thanks to the earth and to daily living for what knowledge and understanding that have given to the poet. "August Rain" (MG, pp 69-70) corresponds in this section to "Looking into a Tide Pool" and The Dead Seal near McClure's Beach" in theirs. Failure to maintain the intense joy of communicating with the "two worlds" is here accepted and affirmed philosophically as a necessary aspect of the way of life, which will "nudge the hole open that lets the water in at last." Too violent a desire to maintain the joy drives it away. These eight poems confirm that the collection is a spiritual autobiography, as kinds of experience and forms of consciousness are recorded in terms of a way of life that rejects, as too horrible, Americas monuments of practicality, such as cities and modern farming techniques. "A Windy Day at the Shack" (MG, p. 68) suggests that the way of life is also a way of knowledge;

this idea Happold believes is common to the mystical life. The closing triad of poems function as a resolution for the collection as a whole.

The closing poems express Bly's aesthetic, sacral, and moral concerns. "Grass from Two Years" (MG, pp. 71-72) is about writing; "Christmas Eve Service at Midnight at St. Michael's (MG, pp. 73-74) is about Christ's relationship with the sea of the inward world; and "Opening the Door of a Barn I thought Was Empty on New Year's Eve" (MG, pp. 75-76) is about the moral obligation of men to "not demand eternal life."

In Morning Glory I the reader has responded to "intense nurses," the Virgin Mary, living and dead animals, Adrei Voznesensky -- whose voice "is the voice of some deep throated woman shouting at last" -- and Bly himself, becoming for a moment's Illumination separated from "human dullness" and forgetting "the name his father gave him." The section ends with the sea flowing into his consciousness. In Morning Glory III, his attention turns to the course of his life. The concept of a mediator between the vain human and the unselfish non-human becomes a statement of the relationship between perception and the writing process. City living sweeps pencils, photographs, fruit, everything, off the writer's table. The medium, consciousness itself, was explored in Morning Glory II, which ended in joy; the third section begins by showing that the same consciousness contains terror as well. In the third poem of Morning Glory III the old poet has a line in his forehead that flows from the source of sacred energies into Bly's consciousness. Poets and poetry imitate the medium; hence the poet communicates with "two worlds," and poems are communications between the

poet and the "psyche larger than anyone living." The poem "A Caterpillar on the Desk (MG, p. 67) contemplates a writer's daily work at his craft, which, unlike Frost's "A Considerable Speck," which affirms the presence of a mind in any creature, achieves a glimpse of the divine knowledge that Bly longs to feel in his Heart. "I know there is another room of time," he says in the following poem. Thus, in Grass from Two Years," the poet expresses the joy and certainty that his artistic and religious way of life have given him: "When I write poems, I need to be near grass that no one else sees, as here, where I sit for an hour under the cottonwood." Bly notices grass that has collected as he pursued his way of life "only for a moment," feeling more joy "than anyone alive." The model fits cogently with the image of the grass, as Bly sees it:

> And how beautiful this ring of dry grass is, pale
> and tan, that curves over the half-buried branch --
> the grass flows over it, and is pale, gone, ascended,
> no longer selfish, no longer centered in its mouth,
> it is centered now on the God "of distance and of
> absence."
>
> (MG, p. 71)

There remain parts of the poem my model cannot explain, but my purpose is to be adequate, not exhaustive.

The second to last poem contemplates Bly's feelings, or apprehensions, regarding Christ, the Western world's main symbol of Unity between man and the sacred. Duality marks the contemplation in which the ritual of the sacrament takes place in the "enclosure" of the Church walls. "Outdoors the snow labors its old Manichean labors to keep the father and his animals in melancholy." The poet records his terror of the sacrament: he is permanently involved in the

mediation Christ represents. "The ocean has been stirred and calmed" by the ritual -- not nor pierced, not traversed. As in "On the Ferry across Chesapeak Bay" (SSF, p. 35) "the sea gives up its answer and falls into itself." The way of life gives the poet a degree of certainty that his perceptions of sacrality are epistemologically valid: the traditional symbols and sacraments, to Bly, trap Christ the Son in the outer world where He does not belong, and transform him into a ghostly demon "flying over the water." The poem contrasts with "The Large Starfish," in which the poet enjoyed a welcoming "handshake" with the sacred. In the later poem only fear and confusion are experienced. Yet the fear is so intense that the poet's certainty in the validity of his way of life -- as a way of knowledge -- confirmed.

The closing poem is a contemplation of domesticated animals that delivers a three-fold moral: we should not "demand eternal life," even the beasts "feel an affection run along the heavy nerves," and our materiality, our bodies, and our ways of seeing have "the lamp lit inside, fluttering on a windy night."

As a form of spiritual autobiography, The Morning Glory is committed to recording a longing for pre-sensuous Unity, and the record describes an orderly way of life, in which feeling -- in the sense of apprehension -- thought, and ecstacy are marshaled in an attempt to partake of sacrality directly. Spiritual growth requires faith in personal experience as the ground of all knowledge. Since mystical experience is ineffable, Bly does not try to communicate it to the actual readers of his poems. As a substitute, he describes a way of life in which the frequency of such experience is increased. The

Morning Glory differs from "Sleepers," another form of spiritual autobiography, in that a sense of closed communication between poet and ideal audience is lacking from Morning Glory. The prose poems seem to be communications between the poet and his craft: the autobiographical record of how a poet to develop must imagine himself. Nevertheless, the sacral dimension of Bly's commitment to poetry come to the fore in the prose poems, and can be used by you and me to better understand his poetic oeuvre. Finally, the characteristics of the "two worlds" may be used to further characterize the concept of an ideal audience.

Appollo's nine muses are about the oldest examples of an ideal audience that comes to mind. However, Bly's ideal audience takes its symbolic form not from classical mythology, but from psychology and the Sufic idea of the Beloved. The Camphor collection is a tour de force of successful, closed and dramatic communications in which Bly raises the prose poem to an artistic level equal to his best lined poems. I turn now to a discussion of Camphor, but in order to treat the poems a few more interstices of my model must be indicated.

The Friend Listening Within

A collection of only twenty poems, Camphor is a genuine achievement for Bly. Closer to devotion than betrayal, it is closer to being devotional literature as well. Philip Dacey and Charles Molesworth have written articles on the collection.[14] Dacey's is useful in pointing out the fact that many of the poems are autobiographical; Molesworth's is useful in explaining how the language of the poems is not symbolic, how the "friend" is an ideal audience, and how the book includes a "challenging affirmation." Molesworth is concerned

with identifying a genre that is affirmative, daring, and which remains "essentially poetry and not sacred texts." Though both articles have their problems, they discuss Camphor in terms of a "deep religious longing," as the "surest counsel to spiritual pilgrims," "ecstatic moments," and the "Blakean way." These essays respond to the prose poems much as critics first responded to Light, however. Hugh Kenner has examined the book's Biblical references,[15] and James Finn Latter has remarked that "Everything that Bly touches becomes a bold cause and reason for another book.[16] The continuity and mysticism of Camphor become palpable once the nature of Bly's religious syncretism is added to a description of his sacral commitment.

As I have shown, Bly's response to traditional Christianity is a personal one. Yet the theme of confusing and terrifying Christianity is one of the most consistent themes throughout Bly's work. This fact alone argues for a continuity of religious feeling running from "The Ascension of J.P. Morgan" through to Camphor and beyond.[17] Bly's sacral commitment has always been there, in exactly the same way that his moral commitment has. However, one must look hard and long for an explanation of Bly's aversion to traditional religious symbols and sacraments. Morally, Bly has tried to combat the repression of grief, and champion the Jungian "shadow," and the four mothers in American society, through poetry. But he is a spiritually ambitious man, as well as a morally conscious poet. He desires to experience sacrality in his way of life, and one of the ways in which he tries to incorporate sacredness into personal

experience is through the assimilation of religious concepts from afar. For Bly, distance, in time and space, seems to validate religious ideas and practices. Bly is at ease with Amerindian chanting and Eastern sitting-meditation, but ill at ease with Christianity. But Bly sometimes does re-incorporate elements of Christianity into his personal longing for the sacred. Donald Davie "convicts" Galway Kinnell, a contemporary of Bly's from down south, for the same practice:

> No poet can be blamed for his inability to make the act of Christian faith. But what one can ask of any such poet is, first, that the impediments . . . command respect; second, that having declared his incapacity . . . he should be wary of pretending to make those acts in the terms presented by cultures that are not his at all; and, third, that he should not . . . continue to trade surreptitiously in scraps torn arbitrarily from the body of doctrine he has renounced.

Davie's condemnation arises from a commitment of his own out of which a critic performs a kind of care and healing that promotes "scrupulous and sinuous fidelity, rather than a general area of feeling expansively gestured at."[18] However, as Machado says, "since religious faith seems a difficult thing in our time," "scrupulous and sinuous fidelity" to <u>one</u> truth ought to be twice as difficult.

In Bly's case what we are dealing with is a scrupulous and sinuous fidelity to <u>all</u> truths; even if Bly is troubled by religious ways closest to home, the consistent re-appearance of poems of Christian content shows his attachment. Bly's way out of the "enclosure," the gingerbread house of Western culture, is to grow spiritually; to cast the witch, or the Teeth Mother, into her own oven, and escape. To grow is to obey the will of the Father, and to launch out into the unknown country. Bly

believes absolutely that American universities and educational traditions are a form of "infantilism," and he urges young people to opt out of them. When he tries to point out a way for them to follow, he brings to his advice a wealth of madcap syncretisms:

> The Sufis and the Buddhists leave the gingerbread house and aim for an adult consciousness. But in order to reach that, the soul has to go through the mammal brain, which means to go into human suffering and into the body . . .
>
> As Americans, we have to go through the mammal brain, but we don't want to do that. We went to the Vietnam war and did all that reptile killing and now we refuse to go through the mammal grief. I ended up the reading last night with poems of Kabir, and the students' faces lit up all over the room. It was beautiful. That ecstacy is what they want more than anything.[19]

Davie's existential standard of decency is exactly what one likes to see in a critic; Bly's universal syncretism makes him a bracing poet. Both Davie and Bly, however, answer the same cultural and social needs of certainty, serenity, and joy.

Syncretism is submerged and widespread in Bly's poetic oeuvre. It is difficult to identify Bly's sources, because he is not always exact in his borrowings; however, the essays in Sleepers and The Kabir Book (1977) correspond to Bly's poems as the "Notes" do to The Waste Land. The idea of the body is another theme that is continuous in Bly's work, in that the body is the ground of personal experience. We know that Bly has read the Tao Te Ching, and that his reading in sacred documents is copious. Hence it is not improbable that the Taoist concept of the body places some part in Bly's thought. In the Tao, the body is not merely a physical, or even mythical, entity. It is a microcosm of society.[20]

The human body is the image of a country, with lakes, mountains, forests, towns -- a legislative body and a diplomatic corps. "The Tauist knows how to regulate and harmonize the outer (wai) forces of nature by governing his own body (the inner, nei). This, along with the moral conduct of a country's inhabitants, determines the harmony of a country's inhabitants, determines the harmony of nature." The sage teaches not with words but with the body. Thus, the body, as one of the two main features of Camphor, can be thought of as a ground of personal experience -- which is a continuous theme in Bly's work, and which became the source of all knowledge in The Morning Glory's record of personal experience. It can also be thought of as a microcosm of American society, and Bly's synecdotal images such as navies and wise men travelling the arteries and veins shows this aspect to be continuous as well.

The other main feature of Camphor's syncretism is the idea of a benevolent spirit who dwells within the soul of a man, and with whom he can communicate. The analogy between the inner friend and the ideal audience need not be stressed. St. Ignatus Loyola gave step by step instructions on how to "actualize" Christ in terms of sensible objects in his Spiritual Exercizes. Ignatius's purpose was to creat a vocabulary of images, or sensations, that could express mystical experiences. The Taoists know of an analogous technique of spiritual advancement, called ts'un, which is a purposeful activity that is held to surpass sitting-meditation.[21] This is not a process of visualization, but rather it "makes sensibly present," or "gives existence to" an astral being. The being is actualized in the student's immediate vicinity, "or even within one of the cavities of his own body." The technique had a mani-

fest influence on the vocabulary and imagery of T'ang poetry. The inner friend of Camphor is also to be understood as akin to the auditory and visual images of Jaynes's "bicameral mind" theory, which for the ancients, according to Jaynes, were the voice of a unified divine and civil authority.[22] The inner friend is also akin to the Holy Spirit, the inward aspect of the human soul not perceivable by the senses but central to identity in the areas of knowing, feeling, and willing. The Holy Spirit's divinity is derived from God, yet it exists within us, and makes men semi-divine.[23] In Camphor, however, the most immediate religious "source" for the inner friend is the Sufi concept of the Beloved. The nearest Western counterpart of the concept might be found in the relationship between St. Theresa and Christ: the Spiritual Marriage between man and the Son.

Earlier in this chapter I quoted a poem from Jumping Out of Bed (1972), in which a salmon dives to bring back up "a sack of wedding rings," and Bly comments: "This love is like the sun held inside a tiny solar system,/ like the moon kept in a pouch."[24] The final poem of The Morning Glory contains the sentence: "Bodies with no St. Theresas look straight at me." I have suggested that Bly's collections of poems gradually win an increasing confidence in his ideal audience. With the publication of Camphor, the ideal audience has evolved into a wholly religious idea. And with this transformation, the emphasis in the poems shifts from moral to amatory content.

The one source that contributes most to the tone, language, and themes of Camphor is Kabir. Bly's first "translations" of the Hindi poems of Kabir appeared about the same time his work with the Japanese

poems of Basho appeared, in 1971. But in 1960 Bly translated this poem by the tenth-century Spanish Moslem Ibn Hazm:

> How many people I am good to, not because I like them,
> or because I don't like them, but for a special reason!
> The affection I give them is intended for another,
> like seeds we set out in a trap to catch birds.[25]

This is a conventional Sufi poem in which the love for God is expressed through the language of love between human lovers. The section called "Water Drawn up into the Head," in "Sleepers Joining Hands," contains another indication of the inner friend: "There is another being living inside me./ He is looking out of my eyes./ I hear him/ in the wind through the bare trees" (SJH, p. 65). Note that the inner friend dwells simultaneously within the mind of the poet and without, for all things in nature precede from the Ungrund.

The Kabir Book was published in the same year as Camphor. Bly was attracted to Kabir because of the revolutionary element in the Hindi poet, his contempt for scriptural authority, and the influence of Sufi mysticism. To Kabir all names of God were equal, and he held no one master but his inner friend, the divine Satguru, "so that his 'faith' or 'confidence' remained apparently supportless, like that of the mythological 'Fire-bird' to which he has compared himself:

> 'The Fire-bird has made his nest in the air,
> he dwells for ever in-between,
> From earth and sky, he remains aloof:
> his confidence needs no support!'[26]

Kabir believed that the way of spiritual growth is hard, not easy. Human love is the painful aspect of Unity with God. The way of love is

also a way of knowledge. This way is called the Bhakti Path, about which Bly has written (Bly mistakenly believes, apparently, that the Bhakti Path and Tantric thought were the same, whereas conjugal relations were not allowed after the birth of a son in Bhakti thought).[27] Tantric and Bhakti cults actualized their deities in similar ways.

Sensuality, the inner friend, and a commitment to "thoughts that can save" are the main elements of the prose poems collected in This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood. The Bhakti sources contributes an exemplarary tradition of the salvation of others through love. The influence of the poet Kabir -- like that of the "wise old man" in "Sleepers" -- enables Bly to escape his systems of duality, feminine principles of eternal fecundity, Freudian transformers, and the evolution of the brain. Kabir shows Bly how to call them all equal, and hence Camphor, despite its syncretism, is laced through with Biblical allusions. Camphor and gopherwood, as incense woods related to the Noah story, characterize the body as an "ark." My model of Bly's sacral commitment now contains a number of conflicting terms. It is an appropriate model, however; as Ekbert Faas says, the way that Bly has imagined himself enables him to experience a "post-Lawrencean consciousness" that does not fragment the psyche.[28] Bly's response to Faas's question: "it has to do with the integration of previously disconnected parts of the psyche, therefore you can't point to any one thing."

Camphor is infused with the same sacral commitment as The Morning Glory. The main differences are two: the later book is a collection of communications with an ideal audience, who may now be called a divinity of being, within the poet's psyche, who is benevolent and communi-

cable; also, the later book represents Bly's choice to take the "hard way" in his longing to know the sacred. Bly chooses to take the painful way of human love as a way of knowledge. In Bly's most recent collection, This Tree Will be Here for a Thousand Years, this painful way of knowledge is wrought in lined poems that recall the imagery and tone of Silence. The first poem in Camphor assesses Bly's published works of poetry up to the time of writing: the torporous, sweet poems of Silence, the tortuous poems of Light, the "generosity" of Sleepers that offered the poet's inward life to "all the sleepers in the world," and the other "room of time" discovered in Morning Glory. "The heat inside the human body grows, it does not know where to throw itself -- for a while it knots into will, heavy, burning, sweet, then into generosity, that longs to take on the burdens of others, then into mad love that lasts forever. The artist walks swiftly to his studio, and carves oceanic waves into the dragon's mane." Oceans of love now, instead of consciousness. In earlier poem the ideal audience was a form of consciousness that Bly hoped to communicate with through moral duty and thought. Here it becomes an integral part of his personality; growth of the soul matched by indiyiduation: a balance. Moreover, it brings a sense of immanence of the ineffable into his life as an artist; and his sensual body, no longer denied as it was in "The Testament" and "Looking into a Face," become a trusted ark. The second poem affirms a serenity in domestic life, while at the same time admitting that "This protective lamplit left hand hovering over its own shadow on the page seems more loved than we are" (TBCG, p. 15). Like Rilke's use of the first person plural pronoun in his second Duino elegy, the "we" allows the poet to move for-

ward with a tone of assurance. This "we" "never includes anybody but the temporal incarnation of the divine voice," and "refers less to the poet in general as the incarnation of the divine spirit than to our poet's personal situation and time of life."[29] Neverthless, this "we" is restrictive, not inclusive of the actual readers.

In the third poem, understanding comes to the poet in an image of a man who comes to the poet while he sleeps, and puts a dulcimer in his hand (Bly plays the dulcimer). After he has this, the poet obediently goes in search of the Father in the next poem, "Finding the Father" (TBCG, p. 19). The influence of Boehme's system is clear in this poem, and Boehme's other-directed Father who demands the obedient love of the Heart is described in narrative, in terms of a family history. In the next poem Bly reconciles the ascending and earth-bound desires of his way; when he then sleeps, he asks himself in the third person: "Who will go with him?" And he realizes that even in the utter darkness of deep sleep "He will meet another prisoner in the dungeon." Here family history is replaced by fairy tail motifs. Camphor has a simple structure -- the simplest of all Bly's books. Poems of night-time follow those of day-time, except for two poems in the middle, which have no temporal reference (TBCG, pp. 43 and 45). This is significant of Bly's new-won peace with himself, for all earlier books are characterized by "looking up angrily at the light," the main Christian symbol of revelation.

In "Going Out to Check the Ewes" (TBCG, p. 23) -- ewes, when they catch cold, bear sick lambs -- dragons re-appear, and the body is described as a microcosm and sacred. "This body longs for itself far out

at sea, it floats in the black heavens, it is a brilliant being, locked in the prison of human dullness . . ." The sacrality that Bly could only witness in the dead seal and starfish poems is now experienced as dwelling in his own body, by virtue of his ability to communicate with the friend listening to him from the "two worlds." That the body is a Taoist country is expressed by the next poem, "Galloping Horses," which, along with allusions to the Biblical Eden, makes the suggestion that the flesh, or the body, might be a fourth stage -- after the new brain, and adult consciousness. The concept that sacred force longs to manifest itself in the outward world, through the Son, or Heart, is brought into play in "A Dream of What Is Missing" (TBCG, p. 27). Here Bly receives the knowledge that God loves the senses, and that it is this love for the senses that reach out toward objects that is the cause of His Immanence in the outward world. To know the senses, therefore, is to know the sacred; the same goes for thought, as "the ruthless body" changes "our scholarly labors . . . into certainty and healing power" (TBCG, p. 29). Through a successful breakthrough into the sacred, Bly now feels that he can heal, and the despair of "Depression" and "Sleepers" vanishes.

The station of passage between binary oppositions is reached in "Walking to the Next Farm" (TBCG, pp. 31-32). Here snow, a motif and a theme in all of Bly's books, is related to sexual symbolism; images of the multitudinousness of snowflakes culminate in a balance between opposites, "and inside its own center it lives!" This imagery is metamorphosed into that of protozoa in the next poem, "The Origin of the

Praise of God." In each cell of our bodies there is a spark of the sacred that flows through the channels of the unconscious into the senses to give immanence to objects. This is the same channel through which a "small black stone" must come, to lodge itself in the outward world as a place of pilgrimage, and a place to remember Protozoic times. The book reaches a climax in two atemporal poems in the middle. In the poem "How the Ant Takes Part" (TBCG, p. 43), a domestic scene is described as totally at one with all life in the world. In the following, ecstacy is found to be the "hard way," a way of knowledge achieved through an intense longing to grow spiritually. The poet learns that grief, death, and failure are also divine. The movement of the book begins to return to a state of being in which certainty, serenity, and ecstacy are more transient, at this point.

"The Pail" (TBCG, p. 47) has a tone not of discovery, but of remembered experience of ecstacy and Unity. Here an object, a pail of pig-slop, is expressed just as it is. The next poem is a companion to "Galloping Horses," and here Eden is deserted; a fall has occurred, and a note of sadness begins to overcome the prose. Bly's anti-humanist tendencies are, at least for a moment, extinguished in "We Love This Body" (TBCG, p. 51):

> We love this body as we love the day we first met
> the person who led us away from this world, as we
> love the gift we gave one morning on impulse, in a
> fraction of a second, that we still see every day,
> as we love the human face, fresh after love-making,
> more full of joy than a wagonload of hay.

In the next poem duality is re-accepted and re-affirmed as the natural condition of the universe, as it is in Boehme, a creative flux: "the

energy in the double flower does not falter." After these poetic communications break through spatial and temporal laws, they circle back to a loving declaration of faith in the inner friend, and all of the names of God, in the final poem, "Snowed In." Circularity, is obviously present in the collection; continuity of life is here too, in that the poems return to the themes of failure and duality that are prominent in all of Bly's books; and a search for origins is present in the syncretism that synthesizes religious ideas from Boehme to the ancient Chinese, from American Puritanism to Sufi theosophy. The poet's way of life is affirmed as a way of knowledge, and the choice has been made to take the painful way of human love. Bly's own systems of moral and religious ideas are given a place, "but you can't point to any one thing." The book ends on a note of "transsubjectivity":

> What shall I say of this? I say, praise to the first man who wrote down this joy clearly, for we cannot remain in love with what we cannot name.
> (TBCG, p. 59)

In this chapter I have laid down a vocabulary with which to discuss the images, or sensations, of Bly's prose poems. When the poems are read in a context of other mystical writings, and a general syncretistic pattern is established, the poems reveal a four-fold continuity. An orderly way of life settles into "daily work" in The Morning Glory, which achieves a roughly twelve-hour cycle in Camphor. This orderly cycle is a kind of experience in which doubt and failure vie with praise and certainty. Transient and cyclical experiences of Illumination culminate in a form of consciousness in which longing for spiritual growth

achieves a spiritual love for both the sacred and the profane. Consciousness takes symbolic form in the inner friend, which is a wholly religious symbol. All of this taken together describes a way of knowledge. Knowledge is achieved through contemplation, concentration, and longing for Unity. The Unity sought after is one between the poet's personal experience and awareness, and sacral immanence. The relationship between Bly's sacral and moral commitments and his art is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

THE AESTHETIC FACET

Robert Bly's use of language in his poems can be thought of as an extension of the "'transconceptual' vision" that L.S. Dembo holds to belong to Williams, Stevens, and Marianne Moore.[1] To Dembo these poets write "an esoteric manifestation of their concern for esoteric perception." This tradition stems from such statements as this one from S. Foster Damon's Amy Lowell: A Chronicle: the modern poetry is "externality! the regarding of the world as having an existence separate from oneself." At the other end of the tradition, Bly holds that poetry should be committed to externality, that it should be separate from oneself, but also that its separateness and its being proceeds from the unconscious of man. It proceeds from the "sparks of the soul" that exist even in protozoa. To make art mimetic of such perception is to make art that is wild and mad as the divine in the outward world. Dembo also says: "Aesthetic perception, bizarre in poets like Williams or Stevens, is traditional in poets like Pound and Eliot. For Pound, the world of reason coexists with the world of mystery; for Eliot, the two worlds are discontinuous."[2] And for Bly, the "two worlds" are made discontinuous only by reason, or traditional modes of perception; otherwise, they are "asleep in the outward world."

In this chapter my main concern is to discuss generally how Bly's commitments are reflected by the aesthetic facet of his life. Morality

and mysticism are non-aesthetic standards by which to judge poetry; yet the moral and religious urging that lead Bly to write dramatic communications with an ideal audience, or an inner and divine friend, does lend a degree of autonomy to his better poems. In that Bly hopes that his poems will open a door through which Americans may choose to go, following the track that leads to the ideal audience, or the inner friend, so that Americans and American society will be healed and integrated, his poems may at times achieve that disinterested quality that Kant assigned to "pure" art. When Bly writes about his own inner journey, the spiritual and moral autobiographies offer personal experience as exempla, and not confession. The poems sometimes present universal principles in a state of communication with a particular poet, and Bly's work could be assessed through a discussion of its aesthetics in Schiller's terms. However, there can be no doubt that Bly does not write art for the sake of art: he has moral purposes and desires to grow spiritually through the practice of his craft. Bly's aesthetics may then be thought of as a development of Baudelaire's view, in which poetry is a manifestation of correspondences in a "forest of symbols," both partly moral and partly spiritual. But it is dangerous to attempt to draw Bly in line with French traditions, and the French and British brands of surrealism; Bly's surrealism is thoroughly grounded in the more socially and politically conscious surrealism of Spain and South America.

Poe's concept of Ideal Beauty, which exists beyond the physical world, and is evoked in the language of the physical, aligns itself neatly behind Bly's ideal audience and inner friend: except that the values affirmed by Bly's poems are moral and religious values, and not

values of Beauty. Rimbaud's belief that the poet must derange the senses in order to produce new forms of poetic content may well have a bearing on the processes through which Bly determines the choice and arrangement of his discontinous images and metonymies. The pleasant torpor and melancholy of Silence in the Snowy Fields, and This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years, the texts of my discussion in this chapter,[3] far from being decorous, are inspired by an ethical retreat from which to make poetic judgements about society and traditions. But despite Bly's refusal to write poetry devoid of non-aesthetic standards, a gleam of Pater's "gem-like flame" still burns in his poems, especially in the two collections mentioned above. The concept of values that achieve an impersonal and objective existence in poetry is very much alive in Bly's work.

However, the impersonal and objective values, perceptions, or themes in Bly's poems are also "personal" in the sense that they have "consciousness," and desire communication with "our poet." Moreover, this independent significance of values is only "objective," in the sense that it dwells on the nether side of the unconscious. And in this, Bly judges the moral standards of America and the Western world by the standards of the inward world, or Ungrund. In the previous chapter I distinguished the concept of the Self into a Self, or soul, that is to be lost, in a religious sense, and the Self, or identity, that is to develop, in the sense of Jungian individuation. This distinction is crucial to my discussion of the aesthetic facet of Robert Bly's commitment to poetry.

The Aesthetics of Purgation

All longing desires union with its object, and since Bly desires

to grow spiritually and to heal, in a moral sense, his longing is for union with a moral and spiritual ground of authority. Charles Altieri discusses Bly's poetry as an "event"? the union and duration of that union in which the created object merges with a creative subject.[4] Bly's poems express an awareness of the ineffable, the mystery, the timelessness, the essence of epistemological and phenomenological reality. The desired is an unanalyzable entity, a wholeness that cannot be broken down. Union with the desired absorbs the poet into this wholeness. In this sense the poems express moral and religious affirmation, and this affirmation -- the feeling, certainty, and joy that is communicated between poet and the ideal audience, or inner friend, of the poem -- brings a sense of authority into the poet's life. The prose poems, and "Sleepers Joining Hands," as types of spiritual autobiography, record the entrance of this sense of authority into the poet's way of life. It is this sense of authority which is analyzable by the real readers. And when Bly's oeuvre is read as a statement of life's events, ordered by a commitment to making poetry out of experience, as a way of knowledge, what is apparent is that Bly's longing for communication, as described in previous chapters and above, is expressed in a finite set of images, themes, motifs, rhythms, and phonoaesthetic strategies. Some of these are: darkness, first snows, lonely fields in the fall, oceans, all things feminine, simple everyday objects in domestic scenes, paired stresses (or spondees), and an interplay of two or three vowel-sounds over three or four lines.

Bly's "Poem in Three Parts" (SSF, p. 21) describes a progress from private affirmation to a more publically authoritative one. The first

part of the poem, which is numbered as are all the parts, with a stylish roman numeral, describes a purely private sense of affirmation arising from "nowhere," except sleep: "Oh, on an early morning I think I shall live forever!" The use of "shall" instead of "will" suggests that the feeling has been permitted. In the next line the phrase "my joyful flesh" suggests that sensual pleasure is permitted along with intimations of immortality. In the second section, the private affirmation is tested against American poetic traditions of the same, in language that suggests Pound's tent and Whitman's loafing: "I have suffered and survived the night/ Bathed in dark water, like any blade of grass." Thus the permission derives from a psychic turmoil during sleep, and the sense of authority behind it is given a location, implicitly: the unconscious. This sense of authority is, in the third part of the poem, given a name; it becomes public:

III

The strong leaves of the box-elder tree,
Plunging in the wind, call us to disappear
Into the wilds of the universe,
Where we shall sit at the foot of a plant,
And live forever, like the dust.

The name is Buddha -- Bo tree replaced by a tree indigenous to the United States. Thus, though the real reader may not be able to follow the thread that leads "into the wilds of the universe," though he may not be able to share with the poet's communication with the "call," he can understand how the poem delivers a sense of authority to him. Often, in Bly's three-part poems, an "opening donée" is tested against indigenous details that become more and more esoteric, until, in the third part

a ground of authority is named that is distant in time and space, or far from conventional modes of perception.

The sacral and moral aspects of Bly's commitment to his craft make a sense of authority available to his aesthetic perceptions. The actual readers can study how, and how well, this sense of authority contributes to meaning, and how and how well, it is communicated to us. Bly's poems attempt to heal and integrate by providing a sense of moral and spiritual authority to us as alternatives to traditional and conventional authorities that Bly believes to be deficient.

In a poem that is an uncanny anticipation of the Camphor poems, the important theme of humility can be seen as integral to the idea of obedience that I discussed in the previous chapter. Humility is the logical outcome of a moral and spiritual desire for authority. The closer the Self comes to the ineffable, the closer it must come to extinction. The mystical way is described as the Dark Night, or the Purgation of the Soul; I will refer to this process as "selfloss" below. The mystic finds himself by losing himself, just as a child will, in obedient love for his mother. The poem "Solitude at Night in the Woods" (SSF, p. 45) is another of Bly's three-part poems. It begins with the line: "The body is like a November birch facing the full moon," which clearly anticipates the Camphor poems. There is no ambition in this body, or this tree. The second part of the poem describes the poet's dutiful commitment to sympathetic obedience to cyclical time:

II

My last walk in the trees has come. At dawn
I must return to the trapped fields,

To the obedient earth.
The trees will be reaching all the winter.

Imminence of autumn brings the poet's task to the fore; fall and winter are for Bly, the seasons of creativity. Humility and duty contribute to a sense of moral authority here, and in the third part joy is grounded in an olfactory image in which partridges figure. The partridge hides in the dark, thick undergrowth, but makes a great commotion to escape when disturbed, in order to lead an intruder away from her chicks. Thus the sense of moral authority is "grounded" in an image of unselfish sacrifice to duty, chosen from the non-human world. Humility is the logical outcome of an obedient longing to communicate with the sacred, for the Self, or soul, is gradually stripped away by the exigencies of the larger sphere, the superior morality of the "two worlds."

Reaching beyond the rational intellect, Bly's contemplation of the ineffable leads fortuitously to experiences of certainty, ecstacy, and joy, which help to develop a consciousness sanctified by its object. An important aspect of this consciousness, which achieves wholeness in its object, is Bly's duality: the belief in the "absolute separation of spirit and matter, which was probably given its most effective formulation by Descates, [and] has been especially significant in western intellectual traditions."[5] Indeed, Descartes is often blamed for Western dualism, in the sense that it is a spiritual sickness, or bar to wholeness. But the entire concept of <u>wanting</u> to achieve wholeness necessitates disparity, just as wanting an answer necessitates a question. Bly longs for the Unitive Life, and his duality is kept well-greased in his anticipation of slipping through the gate-posts of the

sacred and the profane, good and evil, non-human and human. Though Bly is often dubbed anti-intellectual, anti-establishment, anti-humanistic, and so forth, his thought, or way, remains in line with some of the chief traditions of Western culture. In Bly's introductory note to This Tree (TTTY, pp. 9-11), Bly states his belief that it is important for "what is inside and what is outside" to merge; but then he concludes, speaking of his own poems:

> So sometimes I admire the poems that follow for their quality of doubleness, of the complicated consciousness, the presence in them simultaneously of two presences. The mood is impersonal, as in all works of art that are interested in some consciousness beside the author's. Sometimes they seem too impersonal.

These remarks show that Bly is still in line with the aesthetics of Pound and Eliot, who brought the idea of an impersonal and objective quality from French Symbolist into English and American poetry. The closest Bly comes to a Buddhist vision of oneness between spirit and matter, despite his syncretist reading, his sitting-meditation, and his translations and borrowings, is a concept of the "spark of the soul" in each living cell. The prose poem "The origin of the Praise of God" (TBCG, pp. 35-36) expresses this concept.[6]

Bly's duality is not only a form of religious consciousness, won through "working hard at inner labor," but also a moral conviction. In aesthetic terms, sacral and moral elements are presented in a poem in such a way as to emphasize the duality that must be overcome before the Self may merge with what Coleridge called the primary imagination, or the I AM. From Descrates to Coleridge to Archibald MacLeish's belief

that a poem must not mean but be, a line exists at which Bly occupies a point very near to the present; at this point, poetry must not merely exist as a context of binary oppositions, but be a communication between one side of the "enclosure" and the other. However, Bly's aesthetic commitment, for all that the poet cares for the maturation of his poetic, simultaneously embraces and abhors the presentation of duality. The reason for this is simple: Bly believes that a poem must embrace the horror that exists when opposites, like love and hate, or healing and killing, become so extreme as to become indistinguishable. Thus one of the closing poems of The Morning Glory describes Christ as a demon "flying over the water with wings spread, a wound on his chest" (MG, p. 74). Bly believes that to grow one must experience the interchanging of values of opposites, as a kind of sacramental rite de passage into perception of the "two worlds." This explains, in part, Bly's aversion to Christianity, for in Christianity the values are weighted heavily in favour of the good. It is an aspect of the intensity of Bly's commitment that he clings to such beliefs, when his own poems sometimes counsel him to be more human, to adhere more strongly to the good. I am thinking here specifically of "Depression" and "Sleepers."

To Bly, conventional modes of perceiving the sacred in the outward world "trap" Christ on this side of the gate:

> So rather than saying that Christ is God or he is not,
> it is better to forget all that
> and lose yourself in the curved energy.

Purgation of the Self, or soul, is the means by which this trap is

avoided; and it is not only Christ who is trapped, but all men:

> What is human lies in the three hairs, caught,
> the rabbit left behind
> as he scooted under the granary joist.

The authority of the ideal audience, like that of any ideal, generates dramatic situations. Several of Bly's earliest poems make use of a vatic persona, similar to Eliot's Tiresias and Rimbaud's narrator in Le Bateau Ivre. "Poems on the Voyage"[7] and "A Missouri Traveller Writes Home: 1830"[8] are examples. The persona of "The Voyage" is a Wild Man, an ascetic, a wise man of the mountains who has "fallen into a rage." He has the authority of divine madness, and the poem is crowded with dramatic images. His authority generates a dramatic situation as he is brought -- through the poem's language -- into the human sphere. Any incursion of harsh moral truths and disturbing presences of sacrality creates a dramatic situation in the mundane. Precisely the same effect is achieved when Bly brings a sense of authority into his plain diction and simple syntax. Bly abandoned his experimentation with vatic persona in favour of what I have been calling the ideal audience, and what came to be called an inner friend by Bly, in order to ensure the sense of authority is "grounded" in a living communication, which remains nevertheless an impersonal artifact. The sense of authority derives from a conviction that someone of spiritual and moral worth listens and understands the poet as he writes his poem down.

The sense of authority also produces a dramatic tension between the actual readers and the ineffable source of either sacral or moral

authority. The poems challenge us to try to identify with Bly's ideal audience, and to "merge at last" with being that exists beyond the concerns of the ego. The audacity is another aspect of Bly aesthetic commitment. His poems communicate a sense of authority that derives from the ineffable, and we are asked to respond to the poems from some source of ineffability within us. But in this way the actual audience becomes aware of a ground of authority hitherto unknown to us. Here is an image of such an ineffable response: "Sounds are heard too high for ears,/ From the body cells there is an answering bay;/ Soon the inner streets fill with a chorus of barks" (LAB, p. 6). The kind of response Bly claims for himself in these lines is a poetic one, and readers who are not poets, or who are poets but work with verse in a different way, may feel that the poem's analysis and interpretation is a "continuation of the translating act of the poem itself."[9]

The actual reader is forced into a poetic, re-creative process of his own, which only an ideal reader could perform to perfection. What supports and justifies the real reader's process -- and encourages him to try -- is the sense of authority that Bly brings to it, dramatically, in the end of the poem: "The filaments of the soul slowly separate:/ The spirit breaks, a puff of dust floats up,/ Like a house in Nebraska that suddenly explodes" (LAB, p. 6). Authority is essentially a dramatic element in Bly aesthetic commitment to his craft. Through it his lycricism and didacticism move the real readers by "pretending" to move another character in the poem -- a kind of shadow-character off stage. A dramatic tension in the situations of the poetry, that moves both the actual and the ideal audiences, though in different ways, helps to

communicate, and to become a communication, with the incommunicable. Both Frost and Eliot used conversational rhythms in verse to "pretend" a communication with someone other than the actual reader.[10] A poem's sense of authority, as it derives from Bly's ideal audience, helps to communicate what Frost called "the sound of sense" to the human community: fundamental and human emotions that are universal and unanalyzable on the printed page.

The image is Bly's primary means of bringing his desire into a significant relation with the meaning of his poems. The actual reader can observe and even participate, to some extent, in the process of Purgation, or selfloss, that ultimately renders a sense of superior authority available to the poet and his poem. Bly's country poems, which are collected in Silence and This Tree, present a poet's longing to "imagine himself" in terms of private and ethical apprehensions of authority. In the poet's way of life and knowledge cognition is present, but often overwhelmed by longing, and the forms of consciousness, and kinds of experiences, that result from the longing. The sense of authority that Bly "catches" in his way of life as a poet is tested, in several poems, against other sources of authority that could be assimilated by Bly. The fear and confusion that Bly feels for traditional symbols and sacraments is related to this "testing" component in that Bly's personal moral and religious feelings acquire a greater intensity by being cast into conflict. Conflict, like Bly's duality, is the "stuff" his surrealist dreams "are made of." I will return to the problem of the image in Bly's aesthetic commitment in the concluding section of this chapter, which analyzes three recent poems.

I will conclude this introductory discussion by broaching the idea that in Bly, as well as in his poems, there are actually two distinct kinds of longing present. One expresses itself in images of the Purgation of the soul; the other expresses itself in images of ineffable authority. Images of selfloss represent moments in a poem when the poet's communication with his ideal audience is such that he and the audience are almost inseparable -- they "merge at last." Images of authority represent moments in the dramatic, closed communication of the poem in which the poet returns his attention to the needs of his real audience. That his language can carry a sense of ineffable authority over to the actual readers, to draw them into the drama, in simple images, rhythms, syntax, and diction, shows that the mere discontinuity of Bly's poetic is not sufficient to explain why and how Bly manages to be influential in contemporary American literature. The ethical and mystical aesthetics that I have developed in the thesis is one way in which we can come to terms with such a recalcitrant body of work.[11]

The Country Poems

This Tree (1979) contains twenty-four new poems and reprints twenty poems from Old Man Rubbing His Eyes (1974). The Old Man collection is reproduced without change. I will be referring to This Tree I -- the earlier collection -- and This Tree II in the pages that follow. In the note to This Tree, "The Two Presences," Bly explains that the poems "form a volume added to Silence in the Snowy Fields; the two books make one book." Thus, this "one book" has a five-part arrangement, as does Light. Bly comes full circle with the publication of This Tree. It is fitting that he would preface the collection with a statement of

his poetics. The essay in Sleepers asserts Bly's esoteric and eccentric ideology; The Kabir Book's "Note" asserts the poet's belief in a way of life as a way of knowledge and spiritual growth; "The Two Presences" asserts Bly's personal ideas about the making of poems.

First of all, Bly asserts that poems should have what he calls "ground tone . . . the consciousness out there among plants and animals." This "consciousness out there" is the responding consciousness of things that have proceeded from the Father through the unconscious. Bly goes on to claim that the poems collected in This Tree make the presence of two separate awarenesses known, when they are successful: "my own consciousness, which is insecure, anxious, massive, earthbound, persistent, cunning, hopeful; and a second consciousness which is none of these things. The second consciousness has a melancholy tone." Bly admits that he is describing an artistic intention, and not an achievement. Then, characteristically, he takes an absolute position on the matter. "I've come to believe, however, that it is important for everyone that the second consciousness appear somehow in the poem, merged or not. It's time." What Bly is saying here is that poems he has written himself "in this style" mark an important turning in the artistic intentions behind poetry in this century. It is an aesthetic statement as well, for he is insisting that poetry incorporate a poet's own way of life into a poetry that obtains autonomous status through its capacity to contain the consciousness of the unknown.

The arrogance of Bly's silent argument is matched paradoxically by the humility in which he confesses his own failures. It is to Bly's credit that he would confess his shortcomings outright, since the themes

of failure, fear, and confusion are clearly a major element in his work as a whole. And This Tree does contain more apparently failed poems than Silence. The opening poem of This Tree II, for example, with its awkward rhyme, rhythm, and private symbolism, does not offer a great deal of help to the real reader. Bly describes his own work in terms of "ground tone," an impersonality of mood, the "line with simple syntax," and a "sequence of sounds, a rhythm, and an image that carries the inner and the outer together without letting either fall." Thus Bly's dualism, as a matter of the inward "two worlds" engaged in creative conflict opposed to the outward world engaged in a conflict between obedience and disobedient self-love, achieves something like a truce. The need for selfloss as a poetic principle is now balanced by a need for self-love. Bly's commitment to the sacred draws him ever closer to the ineffable that diminishes the importance of the Self, or soul; Bly's moral commitment now is definable as a halting, a pausing at the gate of the "enclosure," beyond which lies total absorption in the source of ineffable authority. In other words, a portion of self-love, even if it is disobedient to the will of the sacred, is needed, because without it, the poet would have no reason to write down his poem for us. His communication would become not a literary "silence in the snowy fields," but a very real silence indeed. The moral commitment is, in This Tree, characterized by a care and concern for other human beings, particularly family members. But the sacral commitment still calls "from the borders of death." The aesthetic commitment is manifested in this equal tugging, back and forth, and in Bly's determination to make poems out of his dualistic, but shape-shifting, consciousness. Also, both the human and the non-human are

included in this truce.

Bly has learned, through "Sleepers," that reportedly took thrity years to write, and through the prose poems, the pain and truth of human love. Many poets begin their careers writing about love and women, as Keats began with desperate love poetry and evolved into a more socially aware poet in "Hyperion." So Bly began with socially aware verse and evolved into a unique kind of love poet: a poet who writes about love as a precious realization earned through "hard inner work." In "The Two Presences" Bly concedes that "human" poetry can become "transparent or porous at the end, so that the city, or objects, or the countryside enters." Bly's inclusion of the phrase "or objects" is interesting. A poem that allows the whatness of objects to control the choice and execution of image is essentially an Imagist poem, whose aesthetics Bly had polemically denounced in earlier years. This apparent abrogation is quickly qualified, however. "A 'descriptive poem' is a failure, for it includes only the object, perhaps many details of it, but without its inner grief. Or it can have that, but the psychic container of the writer is missing." In the circle of a poet's awareness of himself in the world, it is that awareness his psyche can contain. But he can sense another awareness existing outside of his circle, and outside of the human frames of reference. This other consciousness contains his psyche, and though the other consciousness dwells without him, it dwells within too, because it has proceeded from the source of the ineffable in the Ungrund, or the id. Hence the poet can express that consciousness as an "inner grief," despite the fact that his psyche is contained yet astire with the other consciousness. If he fails to

express either the other or his own container, he fails. The aesthetics of the idea are paradoxical: anti-human values are affirmed along with human values; the dualism involved in this affirmation is also affirmed. A surrealist aesthetic that affirms subjective images also affirms an Imagist aesthetic that affirms objectivity and impersonality in poetry. It is no small wonder that Bly says, in "The Two Presences": when what is inner and what is outer merge at last, "That is lucky, but it doesn't happen often. Being divided myself, I rarely achieve a poem where the inner and outer merge without a seam." As Bly once said that "you can't point to anyone thing," he now, at least, points to two things.

"When the writer tries for a union of inner and outer in the same poem, he can fail in several distinct ways." Bly's outright confession of failure to achieve this union, together with his newly affirmed belief that non-human and human must both "appear somehow in the poem," amounts to a conviction that a Cartesian separateness of spirit and matter, inner and outer, non-human and human, is a necessary state of being for a poet. To go beyond this stage would be to relinquish poetry for sheer vision; to retreat from it, adhering to either goodness or evil, would be to surrender poetry for evangelism. Either way leads to prose. But the longing to overcome dualism is also needed, because it is the medium through which the poet can manage to communicate with the ineffable ground of moral and sacral authority. Bly has chosen the "hard way" of human love, and in doing so discovers a reason for his aversion to "too easy" transcendentalizing.

The poem "Sitting in Fall Grass" (TTTY, p. 20) is a poem in This Tree I that expresses the seam that Bly longs to remove from his poems,

but has chosen not to, or at least not to remove it easily. The poem opens with a complex image of a sunset that has overt escahtological connotations. This is the whole poem:

> All day wind had called me,
> oceans, a yellow line streaking
> across the sky,
> bones thrown out.
>
> I walked to my sitting place,
> I sat down.
>
> As we close our eyes, what
> piles of bones we see!
> Ruined castles,
> trampled cinnamon,
> crinoline crushed in long grass.
>
> And voices that say,
> I am not like you . . .
> I must live so . . . condemned
> by an old yellow lion . . .

The familiar "call" again recurs. Many critics have noticed an apocalyptic strain in Bly's work; Anthony Libby, for example, believes that Bly's surrealism is more than metaphor, but rather "apocalypse as transition to higher being."[12] In my terms, the surrealism is a communication between the poet and an ideal audience, but in either case real readers can only witness language being transformed into something unanalyzable. The authority of the "call," as divine, or as capable of deranging the sense to forms new effects in language, is strengthened by the temporal acceleration of the sun's setting. That it is the other consciousness is made clear by the bones of the dead, which are "thrown out" of the streak over the horizon. No better image of the seam could be found than this.

The poet responds to the call with a decision to meditate; when his eyes close he sees images of the residual human culture that he carries with him through life. The lines beginning "Ruined Castles" are suggestive of European history -- the word "crinoline," being so glaringly latinate, efficiently evokes the leather skull caps of roman soldiers. But the other consciousness breaks through these images, which cloud the meditating mind, as it attempts to empty itself of all thought, and hence strip away the Self, or identity. Suddenly the Self is extinguished -- for a brief moment -- and the poet looks outward, at objects, just as the Father is other-directed, and manifests Himself in objects. Purgation allows perception to run a course obedient to the way of the other consciousness. But the poet's moment of Unity passes swiftly, and he speaks to a fading memory of the other consciousness, and sadly communicates to Him that he is separate, and will remain so. The sense of authority has been again strengthened by reference to a distant technique of relating to the sacred, and by the three adjacent stresses of "I sat down." Images of "the road" strewn with bones suggest that ways of apprehending the other consciousness have always ended in death. This is the moral that the other consciousness communicates to the poet, by stirring up images in the poet's mind. Longing for union with the sacred, however, empties the mind of Self, so that it is no longer the poet who addresses the sunset, but "voices" that come from within him. The repetition of "yellow" not only directs the real reader back to the sunset, but also suggests that the poet's attention has also returned to the starting point. To call the sunset "an old yellow lion" grounds the poem in a literary metaphor. The initial moment of illumination

fails, and the poet consciously turns to literature, because writing literature is what he does. Thus not only is the seam the necessary starting-point, and the moral the necessary form through which the ineffable communicates itself to the poet, but the aesthetic commitment is also necessary, unavoidable. The three facets of Bly's commitment, once adequately characterized, provide a vehicle with which the real reader can derive a little more understanding of this poem.

Another poem that expresses the seam, or close interdependence, of extreme oppositions is "Reading in Fall Rain" (TTTY, p. 23). This poem is constructed out of two pairs of quatrains, separated by an asterisk. In the first half of the poem simple descriptive images combine with simple syntax and a conversational rhythm to render the poet's feeling of gladness at the coming in of winter, which is for Bly the season of solitude, silence, meditation, and "hard inner work." In the second part of the poem contemplation of a way of life is transformed into an awareness of the way as a way of knowledge:

*

I break off reading:
one of my bodies is gone!
It's outdoors, walking
swiftly away in the rain.

I get up and look out.
Sure enough, I see
the rooster lifting his legs
high in the wet grass.

The poet experiences a moment of Illumination, and looks out of himself. The identification with a barnyard creature suggests a degree of self-loss, and the breaking off of reading suggests that the moment has

negated the epistemological value of study.

The "human" poem can be transparent, or porous, letting objects into the poem's "capture" of the poet's awareness of himself in the world:

III

This wood is like a man who has a simple life,
Living through the spring and winter on the ship of his
own desire.
He sits on dry wood surrounded by half-melted snow
As the rooster walks away springily over the dampened
hay.
(SSF, p. 57)

But sometimes the aesthetic commitment manages to express the human face merged, without seam, into the Darkness of His Wrath that teaches gentleness:

III

It is very late.
I am the only one awake.
Man and women are sleeping nearby.

IV

The human face shines as it speaks of things
Near itself, thoughts full of dreams.
The human face shines like a dark sky
As it speaks of those things that oppress the living.
(SSF, p. 58)

In Bly's country poems either the Self is lost through longing for moral and sacral authority, which creates a moment of altered consciousness, traceable through the language of a poem, or consciousness itself is divided into "two presences." The difference between the "two worlds" and the "two presences" is simply that the presence of two kinds of

awareness, particularly in the country poems, resides contained yet astir in the human sphere. The "two worlds" of the Ungrund are absent, or a presence in absence, which must be sought after in the larger, divine sphere of a "psyche larger than the psyche of anyone living."

When the poet's longing is held in check, the objects that enter a poem retain their respective separateness, and the poet experiences ecstacy as his consciousness bifurcates, in identification with the All, that "calls" from the One. When the longing to meet "the death outside the death" is out of hand, ecstacy is transformed into the pain of human love. However, Bly chooses to take the "hard way," chooses to suffer the All made a singleness. The All becomes a single moment of pain in this domestic scene from "How the Ant Takes Part" (TBCG, p. 43):

> And the mountain climber picks his way up the rocky scarp. How far up on the mountainside he is! As he disappears over the pass, an ant in the village below hurries up his mound of dirt, a woman turns her face back to the stove. Her man that instant feels some mistake in his heart.

The climber disappears into the source that he is seeking, which is the All in which what a spiritually ambitious man does an ant does as well. In an instant, however, he re-appears beside his loved ones, far from that other source. Despite religious longing and despite his experience of himself as "voices," shadows, small animals -- even a tree in "Hunting Phasants in a Cornfield" (SSF, p. 14) -- despite Bly's experience of himself as both perceiver and perceived, creative subject and created object, he remains divided. And despite the fact that his poems present a closed communication between himself and the ideal audience, there remains a seam along which runs a sense of moral and spiritual authority.

The longing for moral and spiritual authority is used for aesthetic purposes in the end. The country poems return poem after poem to those things that give to the poet occasion for selfloss and humility. Humility is the lesson that the ineffable teaches; selfloss is the means by which the lesson is understood. This two-way communication is made available to the poet through his longing. The longing by its very nature divides the One into two, a subject and an object to be sought. This longing is characterized by intense moral and sacral commitments. What holds the longing in check is Bly's aesthetic commitment, for he will make poems out of the moral and sacral "event" of his personal experience of consciousness.

I have discussed Bly's aesthetic commitment as a determination to make poems out of non-aesthetic materials: moral prescriptions, presentiments of sacrality, and a longing for communication with the source of ineffable authority. The longing draws upon Bly's aesthetic commitment, which can now be seen as less a philosophy of art than an intense determination to fashion a "divided wholeness" in art, in order to "ground" his poetry on an epistemological plane from which real readers, family members at least, can learn. Bly's surrealism functions to intensify a sense of authority, and this sense of authority is the chief means through which the ineffable communications of the poems is made available to actual readers. Bly's believes that a work of art must present an impersonal expression of objects; to the aesthetics of modern poetry Bly offers the idea that for a work of art to be truly whole, it must present an objective and external reality that contains and contributes to a subjective and internal reality, contained yet astir with

sources of moral and spiritual knowledge that neither Eliot nor W.C. Williams had reached in their art. The fundamental world of Bly's poetry, then, is not the inward world so much as it is how much of the inward world can be made into art, how this can be made available, and how much can be suffered and sacrificed in human relationships to attain it before a poet loses his ability to love. For the remainder of this chapter on Bly's aesthetic commitment to his art, I will examine three recent poems from This Tree II, but before turning to this I offer a brief summary of some of the technical problems associated with Bly's use of images, the heart of his aesthetic commitment.

Imagery is the chief organ of Bly commitment to making "divisively whole" poems out of his moral and religious concerns. His images function to "translate" ineffable communications between himself and the ideal reader into a palpable sense of authority appreciable by the actual reader. This sense of authority is a residue, or a "beautiful slag," left behind by the longing that would unite creative subject with created object. This longing is a "two-way street," over which moral lessons travel back to the lesser human sphere, and perceptions, or apprehensions, of sacrality travel forward into the larger non-human sphere. Discontinuous imagery allows a further sense of wildness and madness to enter the white spaces in and around the words of the text. The title poem from Jumping out of Bed expresses this wildness and madness:

> Coming nearer and nearer the resonating-chamber
> the poem beings to throw itself around
> wildly,
> silent stretches of snow,
> grass waving for hundreds of miles.

We leap up from our Sadducean pillow,
every spot is forgotten,
our hair crinkly and gold.

The moon hovers over the drunk's hut.
The teaspoon gleams in the trunk of the car.

Other expressions of this aspect can be found in Leaping Poetry: An Idea with Poems and Translations,[13] and "Falling into Holes in our Sentences" (TBCG, pp. 29-30).

Discontinuous imagery is fashioned in such a way as to be responsible to the needs of the human and the poet's need for the sacred. The images are sensual presentations of communications that take place solely within the immateriality and sensations of the poet's mind. Thus the moral, sacral, and aesthetic truths that the images can span are limited by the poet's personality; the images are personal, yet claim impersonality, particular yet grasp universal criteria. The greater the discontinuity between images in a given poem, the greater the poet's ability to suggest a communication in which he actively participates, through longing, in the All-in-One-and-One-in-All. The wilder the "leaps" from the metaphoric domain of one image to that of the next image in succession -- the aesthetic implications of Bly's three brains theory notwithstanding -- the less obtrusive are the more conventional techniques of verse-writing, of which Bly's mastery is plain to see, but debated by his critics.[14] The images "encode" processes of self-loss through increasing discontinuity; as such they may properly be termed "ciphers."[15]

Imagery functions to bring the text of a given poem into an inseparable relationship with the "event" of the communication of the poet

and the ineffable. The ideal reader suffers this "event" -- the duration of a moment of union, or a moment of intense longing -- but the actual reader suffers only the text. The process of selfloss, or Purgation leading to Unity and Identification, is inseparable from the "event"; the "event" is inseparable from the text. A continuity of the sense of authority that absorbs Self serves to express the relationship between text and Self.[16] This continuity contributes to the "event" a variable consciousness that allows esoteric experiences; it contributes to the text contiguous chains of metonymies.

The problem of defining Bly's use of imagery is enormously complex. The images in a poem of Bly's need to be "deciphered." In this his poems are coercive, forcing the actual reader to engage in a creative process of translating the poems out of their ineffable context into some form of rational cognition attendant upon the reading process. This is a refinement of Piccione's description of the kind of reading process the actual reader must undergo: "the essence of 'deep image': the poem <u>is</u> the experience of the in-between state of consciousness, and the feeling passes over us in the recreative process of reading. The result is a quiet affirmation of the spiritual quality of the deeply meditative experience."[17] The taxonomies of Piccione and others depend upon a fiat of categorical definition, and it probably does not matter what one decides to name such images as Bly's. But, by nature, the images accentuate a division between spirit and matter, authority and Self, timelessness and temporality; this "divisive wholeness" combines with other poetic strategies to "ground" the images on the world of literature that surrounds the reading process, or "grounds" them on

an international and syncretistic literary world that is made to surround a contemporary American reading process. Here is my definition, for whatever worth it may have placed against the others: Bly's images are esoteric literary ciphers.

Despite the Spanish, German, and South American sources of Bly's use of imagery, the images do not challenge the aesthetic basis of Imagism, though they do challenge the later metaphysical basis of such aesthetic as Ransom's "miraculism."[18] The discontinuity and wildness emphasize, above all, the importance of avoiding "too easy" a resolution of opposites and conflicts through conceit-laden language: the pain and difficulty of the poet's "psychic container" must appear along with images of the inward the outward worlds, "merged or not." Bly desires in true Protestant fashion to earn the certainty, serenity, and ecstacy of his poetic communications with the ineffable through "working hard at inner labor." These are two of the poems in This Tree II that contemplate the poet's commitment in terms of work:

> I love to stare at old wooden doors after working,
> the cough the ant family makes in ground,
> the blackish stain around screwheads.
>
> How much labor is needed to live our four lives!
> Something turns its shoulders. When we do work
> holes appear in the mountainside, no labor at all.
> (TTTY, p. 43)
>
> How lightly the legs walk over the snow-whitened fields!
> I wander far off, like a daddy-longlegs blown over the water.
> All day I worked alone, hour after hour.
> It is January, easy walking, the big snows still to come.
> (TTTY, p. 48)

Bly wants his readers to work at the translating act of the reading process as well, through which endeavour the actual readers may partake

of some portion of the communication of the poems. In this sense these poems encourage that the effort of reading the poems will open ways through "the mountainside, no labor at all."

Whether or not one responds to Bly's images by forming mental images of his own, or responds to feelings aroused by the poet's deft manipulation of language, there seems little doubt that Bly's poems demand a creative process, on the part of the reader. The debate on the philosophical implications of the aesthetic image is at least as old as the eighteenth century.[19] This debate is analogous with the two ways in which Bly's images are considered as aligned with the surrealist traditions of Europe, by Bly's critics.[20] The French and British surrealist traditions -- and the American contemporary of Bly, Philip Lamantia, can be mentioned here -- seem supportive of the theory that readers respond automatically to images, or "archetypes," emotionally. The Spanish traditions -- as interpreted by Bly and his followers, such as Gregory Orr -- seem supportive of the theory that the reader responds to images creatively. Either the actual reader observes structural peculiarities of language and image in the text that "trigger" emotional responses, as Piccione seems to believe, or he responds creatively to mental images manifested in his own mind, catalytically induced by the text. I have studied Bly's poems through an analysis of structural peculiarities that seemed deliberate and authoritative, and I have reduced the contingent sense of authority to a coercive model of my own. I hope to have convinced my readers that the model appears catalytically induced by the poems. However, whatever conclusions I offer are and must be open to debate.

My model of Bly's "ordered schema of reality" sets his moral and sacral concerns in a chain of continuity that connects the image, as the heart of any given poem, to the ineffable. The model draws from Wittgenstein's idea of a mystical aesthetics that "grounds" both ethical and religious particulars receive justifying value from the summum bonum, or the source of all ineffable authority. In my schematic, however, a private ethical base is distinguished from general aesthetic criteria in that the former recedes into a moral commitment, the latter into a sacral commitment. It is the poem and its images that impedes these recessions from resolution in evangelical tract and yogic visionary silence. And precisely because the poem and its image function in this manner, contained yet astir with the summum bonum, that it is the primary determinator of Bly's aesthetic commitment to poetry.

An Illustration. Let us draw a small ying-yang symbol in black and white on a sheet of paper, preferably grey in colour. We call this symbol an image, the main epistemological and phenomenological object of our analysis, which is characterized by a "divisive wholeness." Now let us draw another circle around the image, in black or white, and call it the text. The next circle, because it is not "before us" and the text is, should be a different colour from the text-circle. This third circle we will call the poetic process that engendered the text. Now let us draw two widening gyres as extensions of the "S" shaped dividing line in the ying-yang symbol, one in white and one in black. These extensions must be broken lines until they cross the circle of poetic process, and solid lines after this point, for the sake of clarity. One of these gyres we will call the process of selfloss that is resolved in

the summum bonum; the other we will call a process that leads to humility, and it too is resolved in the summum bonum. These gyres intersect a fourth circle, which we call the summum bonum. Beyond the fourth circle dwells the ineffable. Along one gyre we "read" the interstices of a moral commitment that derives a private ethical base from a way of life lived in accordance to the summum bonum. Along the other gyre we "read" the interstices of a sacral commitment that derives a private faith from a way of life lived in accordance with the summum bonum. The "moral gyre" moves from the outside into the "image-symbol"; the "sacral gyre" moves from the image on out. This model describes how the moral and sacral facets of Bly's commitment combine in his poems to culminate in a predominant aesthetic commitment to contemporary American literature.

A Man, A Woman; A Woman, A Man

In these concluding remarks I will discuss the aesthetic facet of Bly's commitment to his craft in a setting of three poems. Throughout Bly's oeuvre the theme of the poet's regard for a feminine principle of eternal fecundity -- often related to images of dreams, silence, snowy fields, and darkness -- contrasts with a parallel theme of a man's desire to develop spiritually. The basic dualism of Bly's thought often casts his perception of reality into a male and female dichotomy. I will conclude, therefore, by discussing the philosophy of Bly's art in terms of such a dichotomy.

The poem "Frost Still in the Ground" (TTTY, p. 56) is about writing and "having something to say." An image of frost standing in the fields is compared to the character of a young writer "just beginning to write,

and nothing has been said!" The temporal continguity of the poet's perception of the frost and the simile that then occurs to him generates a poetic communication between himself and his ideal reader:

> The shadows that come from another life
> gather in folds around his head.
>
> So am I, all at once. What I have
> to say I have not said.
>
> The snow water glances up at the new moon. It is
> its own pond. In its lake the serpent is asleep.

Since the objects of Bly's rural environment have, for Bly, inner lives and inner sorrows of their own, separate from the human, Bly's contemplation of them is also a contemplation of the ineffable ground of non-human authority. Thus the opening image is a juxtaposition of "having something to say" and the ineffable, of human consciousness and moral purpose and the other consciousness's higher morality. Bly allows the ineffable to seep into what he desires to say, contributing to his meaning. And Bly longs to bring moral and sacral authority into his art. This longing suddenly possesses the poet in the third couplet -- the second one quoted above. Suddenly Bly's awareness of himself in the world becomes inseparable from the frost, which is bound to the character of a young writer. The concluding image encodes the sensation of selfloss: the concluding couplet must be read as a temporal contiguity connected to the preceding couplet, "It" extending the implications of the "I." The actual reader must attempt to decipher, translate, or reduce the image in order to comprehend the poem as a whole, or as a unified "event." Meaning cannot be separated from your and my recreative acts of reading. Bly responds to the ineffable by losing himself

in it. The strategy of switching the subject from first to third person is one of the most common strategies to be found in Bly's work, and it is a common feature in Tralk's poems as well, one of Bly's European influences.

It is that sudden loss of self that we must assume will move the ideal audience to empathize with the poet, and receive the message of the last lines. The assumption helps us to break the code. Growth and springtime are suggested in the poem's diction. Bly's identification with the "two presences" in a contemplation of frosty fields prepares us for the idea that he also identifies with the puddle of snow water in the last couplet. We know from his work as a whole that winter and snow are causes of celebration for Bly. We know that the season of decay is for Bly a source of imagery that brings in the authority of -- not death itself -- but the slow creeping appraoch of death. This is another feature of the poem that is reminiscent of Trakl. Bly seems to be saying: 'As the season of growth approaches, I lose the sense of authority that I try to communicate with in my poems, and lose myself in desire, becoming as inseparable from my beloved as the image of a waxing moon in a pool, and disconnected from everything around me, like a sleeping snake.'

Bly expresses the overwhelming of one "presence" by another in "Frost." The imagery of the poem drives the ideal audience into the ineffable, along with the "psychic container" of the poem's speaker, where both are extinguished, and the communication comes to an end. This conclusion is prepared for by its apprehension in the couplet, "The shadows that come from another life/ gather in folds around his head," for the "other life" is the sentience of objects, their "inner

grief," which swaddles the human consciousness. Robert Pinsky believes that all poetry defines a division between conscious nature and unconscious nature through the expression of conflicts emotions of longing and isolation.[21] Human consciousness is extinguished when it touches the unconscious, non-human quality of nature. To Pinsky Bly's work is naive and pre-Keats because he senses no feeling of the misgiving, difficulty, loss, or nostalgia that a poet must feel when he returns from contemplation of the non-human to human cognition and discourse. The closing of the gap between reason and unconsciousness -- even if only to a seam -- is always a fiction. Pinsky misses the feeling that Bly is "really communicating" with him through the rational intellect: "In so far as he uses language with conviction, the poet must be a philosophical realist." Bly's poetry rests on an entirely different aesthetic. The poet communicates <u>with</u> ideals, dramatically; like all idealists, Bly's truths lie in a context "above and beyond" practicality, possibility, and realism.

Like Yeats, Bly believes that a spiritual world exists independently from humanity, holding what Blake would call a Deist position.[22] The pre-Keats position of Blake, or Shelley, views the Romantic idea that the secular revolution was apocalyptically redeemable through the imagination in terms of a Christian internalization of the apocalypse. Their apocalypse is akin to St. Augustine's "The Kingdom of God is within you." The visionary Shelley and the systematically mystical Blake both contributed to Yeats' aesthetics in which the apocalyptic sense is, in a poet, a means of burning away the material world. But unlike Yeats, who merely presented sycretistic ideas as equivalent contraries to his country,[23] Bly commits himself and his art to weight the

dialectic on the side of the spirit. In that Bly gives the impression that his poems are not "fictional" unions of opposites, he may be naive, but in his commitment he is post-Yeats.

The expression of selfloss in "Frost" is similar to that in the poem "Night of First Snow" (TTTY, p. 54), except that the latter further characterizes the non-human ineffable in terms of the mother and nature. In "Night" the authority of the feminine is presented as equal to the human. What is human "lies in the way the basket is rocking," in "the three hairs, caught,/ the rabbit left behind/ as he scooted under the granary joist." The poem repetitively insists on a motif of balance in the moment of contemplation, and in the moment of the closed, dramatic communication. The sky is "the grey color that pleases the snow mother," and everything else is black and white. Following the same path as in the discussion of "Frost," one assumes that the image of the rabbit is an identification of the "I" of the poem's opening, which makes the rabbit a male. Thus consciousness disappears under the granary of an unnamed Demeter, and what is human is the residue left behind.

What is human is left behind when consciousness is absorbed into the ineffable. This concept Bly may have inherited from Rilke: "It is a key concept of Rilke's theology and angelology that the divine, God and the angels, do not exist in order to serve the practical, mundane pursuits and interests of men. Using them thus is abusing them."[24] But the curious thing about Bly's country poems, and all of his work, is that they describe non-human realities in human terms. Like Blake, Bly never sees nature apart from human terms. Nature seems to be a source

of sacramental symbols, or images as described in the last section of this chapter, of divine energies, as has been said of Blake.[25] Natural objects, such as a bit of rabbit hair, are incorporated into the poet's consciousness where they can develop into new forms; "having passed through the fires of inner Los these forms may provide a bridge from the dying self to the eternal self." Coleridge held a similar belief, the traditional natura naturans of Christian Platonism, though he developed a "dualistic aversion to nature" in his later years.[26] The idea of natural objects being fuel for "inner Los" is not unconnected to Emerson's theory of nature that would explain all phenomena, and offer a "tranquil sense of unity" to a poet viewing a rich landscape: "The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. What should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? What should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not by the history of theirs?"[27] If Emerson Romantically "reads into nature" that sense of tranquil unity, so Bly does the same with his unease: "We live in wooden buildings made of two-by-fours, making the landscape nervous for a hundred miles" (TBCG, p. 13). It is along the moral gyre that the unconscious non-human "picks up" human attributes in Bly's poems, thus clothing the ineffable in a beautiful slag.

Pinsky and Bly's fellow poet Galway Kinnell both believe that a poetry that desires the ineffable is one that desires extinction of human consciousness. Kinnell believes that modern poetry has erected too many barriers against nature as chaos, that it is "too shoddy, too physical, . . . to invoke the eternal realm".[28] Bly would agree with

Kinnell's distrust of "too easy" dreams of paradise and life after death, but Bly's insistence of the physical human as a "psychic container" is, despite his abhorence of tradition, suggests an aesthetics of humanist dimensions at least as old as Blake. Kinnell wants a new poetry in which the subjects die, just as Bly longs for selfloss; both these kinds of poetry derive "from our inability to enter that paradise or to experience eternity." Both want "Extinction" to include the possibility of mystical "illumination." The dilemma between a poetry of extinction and of illumination creates two kinds of experience; the moral political poems of Light are not the same as the sacral prose poems, and Bly is aware of failures in both cases. But these failures are the result of Bly's aesthetic commitment to try to achieve the "divisive wholeness" of an image of the ineffable clothed by "human dullness."

That aesthetic of the human contained yet astir with the non-human is akin to the traditions that have grown up around Charles Olson and Carl Ortwin Sauer that maintain a "phenomenology of landscape" as a critical system that grasps the physical realities of a scene, which include the "works of man as an integral expression of the scene."[29] Geoffrey Thurley, who holds Bly and Kinnell to be "achingly devoid of human personality," argues that Olson castigates the "object-dominance" of mid-century Imagism, and asserts that contemporary poetry "cannot be honored by abdicating from the subjective."[30] But, though Bly's aesthetic does not challenge the philosophical basis of Imagism, it still demands that the human container be present in a poem dominated by impersonal objects. Bly's poems are interior and subjective landscapes or inscapes that reverberate with both the poet's awareness of himself in

the scene and the objects of the scene. And the other consciousness, to actual readers, seems to be subjective and humanistic as well, for the starfish would not make love to the rock unless the poet was "present." As Bly says in This Tree II: "And the oak when it falls in the forest who hears it through miles and miles of silence?" (TTTY, p. 47). The falling tree does not exist in human terms, but exists in non-human terms. Only the poet, listening along the sacral gyre can tell us, in poems that assume someone listening to the authority that can heal the frail morality of man, "news of the universe" in human terms.[31]

Lastly, the poem "An Evening When the Full Moon Rose as the Sun Set" (TTTY, p. 63) is a contemplation of moral and sacral authority in terms of the sexual dichotomy. The poem is about a sense of ineffable authority that the poet senses during the unusual balance and symmetry of natural time and place suggested in the title. It is a poem filled with long, affirmative lines; the two eight-line stanzas are replete with assonance, part-rhyme, and alliteration. It is richly set out. Bly's contemplation of the sun is cast in terms of male energy, the moon in female. The sun is "on fire," "unseen by many," "archaic," and "doubled up on his own energy." The moon is called "the shining one," and "This rising one," and it "shines on those faithful to each other." The masculine sun energy is closer to the unconscious life of dreams; the moon's feminine radiance is closer to the conscious "life of faithfulness." Rhythm, diction, line-length, sound-play, and imagery work together to communicate a double sense of authority. What will move and win the ideal audience is the realization that it has been heretofore unaware of the two forms of non-human natural consciousness presented in the poem. The sun is concerned with his own energy, his own archaic

errands, his own life, is guided by his own dreams: he will absorb the Self that contemplates it. The moon is concerned with the energy of birds and fish, and "grass fields rolling as in October," and human beings who are faithful to each other: she will send the Self back with a renewed and refreshed Identity into the world. The moon loves; the sun is an example of disinterestedness. Bly loves:

> When we are in love, we love the grass,
> And the barns, and the lightpoles,
> And the small mainstreets abandonned all night.
> (SSF, p. 41)

-- and Bly teaches us to care and not to care overmuch about our human forms of consciousness, for they are merely a beautiful slag left behind, after all. The poem is a well-balanced expression of the "male-ascendent" and "female-descendent" longings in Bly's mind, personality, and way of life. In general the two longings, the two gyres, are at war with each other. Moments of balance and peace are rare. Most often images are either overwhelmed by ineffable authroity, or by a powerful moral lesson that redirects the poem back at the actual audience.

I would like to close the thesis with two quotations that I believe sum up Bly's endeavor, but my treatment of it as well:

> ?Soy clasico o romantico? No se. Dejar quisiera mi verso, como deja el capitan su espadas: famosa por la mano viril qui la blandiera, no por el docto oficio del forjador preciada.
>
> (Am I a classic or a romantic? I don't know. I would quit my verses as a warrior his blade: as famous for the manly hand that brandished it, and not for the smithy's official and precious mark.)
>
> -- Antonio Machado

> Il n'y a personne ici et il y a quelqu'un.
>
> -- Arthur Rimbaud.

Notes

Chapter 1

[1]"The Work of Donald Hall," 32-46. But Bly's ideal of the poetic life also draws upon his regard for such poets as Neruda and Machado. Machado was making statements about the social and artistic responsibilities of poets very similar to Bly's, in 1936. Machado defined "future poetry" as a "continuation of an eternal art in new circumstances of time and place." See: Reginald Gibbons, "Antonio Machado on Culture -- Documents from the Thirties," The Minnesota Review, No. 1 (Sp. 1977), 123-132.

[2]"Note," The Lion's Tail and Eyes: Poems written out of laziness and silence, by James Wright, William Duffy, and Robert Bly (Odin House, Minnesota), pp. 5-6. Cited hereafter as LTE.

[3]"The First Ten Issues of Kayak," No. 12 [no date], 45-49.

[4]For a picture of Bly's way of life compare the following two articles: Robert Bly, "The Dead World and the Live World," The Sixties, No. 8 (Sp. 1966), 2-7; and, Leo J. Hertzel, "What About Writers in the North?" South Dakota Review, 5, No. 1 (Sp. 1967), 3-19. In the latter Bly is described as "a force in regional iterary activities," as turning a poetry reading into a protest demonstration, and as leaving early from the reading in his Volkswagon camper to "go up the north shore and find some isolated beach and sit in the sun and think."

[5]Crunk (psued.), "The Work of James Wright," The Sixties, No. 8 (Sp. 1966), 52-78.

[6]Robert Bly, The Light Around the Body (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); Bly, Sleepers Joining Hands (Harper and Row, 1973): cited hereafter as LAB and SJH.

[7]Allen Tate, A letter reproduced by the Tennessee Poetry Journal, 2, No. 2 (Win. 1969), p. 18. This special issue of the journal is cited hereafter as TPJ.

[8]Francoise Ravaux studies Michael Riffaterre, Stanlet E. Fish, and Jonathan Culler to the end used in the text in "The Return of the Reader," The French Review, 52, No. 5 (Ap. 1979), 708-714. Gerald Prince, Mary Ann Piwowarczyk, and Wolfgang Iser are studied by William Ray: "Recognizing Recognition: The Intra-textual and Extra-textual Critical Persona," Diacritics, 7, No. 4 (Win. 1977), 20-46. See also: Merle Brown, "Poetic Listening," New Literary History, 10, No. 1 (Aut. 1978), 125-139; and, J. Walter Ong, "The Writer is Always a Fiction," PMLA, 90, No. 1 (Jan. 1975), 9-21.

[9]Bly, "Acceptance of the National Book Award for Poetry, March 6, 1968," TPJ, 14-15.

[10]Hall, "Notes on Robert Bly and Sleepers Joining Hands," Ohio Review, 15, No. 1 (Fall 1973), 89-93.

[11]Bly, The Nation, 204, No. 17 (Ap. 24, 1967), 522-524. See Also: "The Dead World and the Live World," The Sixties, No. 8 (Sp. 1966), 2-7.

[12]John Felsteiner, "Translating Pablo Neruda's 'Galope Muerto'," PMLA, 93, No. 2 (Mar. 1978), 185-194.

[13]David Cavitch, New York Times Book Review, Feb. 18, 1973, pp. 2-3.

[14]"Craft Interview with Gary Snyder," New York Quarterly, No. 22, (1978), 13-27.

[15]Bly, Poetry, No. 6 (Sept. 1964), 367-368.

[16]Altieri, Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry During the 1960's (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated Univ. Press, 1979), p. 86.

[17]Bly, Silence in the Snowy Fields (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1962). Cited hereafter as SSF. The two poems mentioned in the text are on pages 42 and 13 respectively.

[18]Ekbert Faas, "An Interview with Robert Bly," Boundary 2, 4, No. 3 (Sp. 1976), 677-706. Faas considers Bly's loneliness and misery living alone in New York as a crucial crisis in his career, which led to a profound distrust in the signifying capacity of language, which crisis is best illustrated by Hugo von Hofmansthal's The Lord Chandos Letters. Hofmansthal's work is a favorite of German Freudians.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Bly, "On the Great Mother and the New Father," East West Journal, 8 (Aug. 1978), 25-27, and (Sept. 1978), 43-46. This talk was given at a conference on health food dieting and astrology!

[21]Bly, "Being a Lutherna Boy-God in Minnesota," Growing Up in Minnesota: Ten Writers Remember Their Childhoods, ed. Chester G. Anderson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1976), pp. 217-218.

[22]James F. Mersmann, "Robert Bly: Driving Inland to the Sea," Late Harvest: Plains and Prairie Poets, ed. Robert Killorn (Kansas City, Montana: Bk Mk Press, 1977), pp. 15-34.

[23]Bly, ed, Sea and Honeycomb (The Netherlands: The Sixties Press, 1966); Forty Poems (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970).

[24]Bly, "Dropping the Reader," Sea and Honeycomb, p. 5.

[25]The opinion that alienation of art and politics began in the seventeenth-century concern for loss of epic heroism and a shift of concern from moral nature of power to man's participation in power is the subject of Thomas Edwards's Imagination and Poetry on Public Themes (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971).

[26]Faas, "Robert Bly," Boundary 2, 4, No. 3 (Sp. 1976), 707-726. This essay was written before Faas tested his thesis in his interview with Bly; Bly was very impatient with Faas in the interview.

[27]Herbert Leibowitz, "Questions of Reality," The Hudson Review, 21, No. 3 (Aut. 1968), 522-563. See also: TPJ; and, Four Poets of the Emotive Imagination: Robert Bly, James Wright, Louis Simpson, and William Stafford, by George S. Lensing and Ronald Moran (Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 77-78, where Lensing and Moran state that to their view Bly's Light is a "shift" from lyrical to moral poetry.

[28]An example of the sort of audience who might come closest to the ideal audience of Light might be found in Curtis Harnack, "Week of the Angry Artists," The Nation, 204, No. 8 (Feb. 20, 1967), 245-248. But Bly addresses only contemporary radicals; he is critical of the Beats and Norman Mailer: Kathy Otto and Cynthia Loftness, "An Interview with Robert Bly," TPJ, p. 45.

[29]"Puritan on His Honeymoon" and "Barnfire During Church," The Paris Review, 139-141; "What Burns and Is Consumed," New World Writing, 11 (Mentor, 1957); "The Ascension of J.P. Morgan," New World Writing, 15 (Mentor, 1959); "The Testament," Poetry, 64, No. 6 (Sept. 1964), 367-368.

[30]That moral standards cannot be legitimately challenged unless from a private ethical base is the subject of B. C. Birchall's examination of the Hegelian dialectic between Moral Life and Ethical Life: "Moral Life as the Obstacle to the Development of Ethical Theory," Inquiry, 21, No. 4 (Win. 1978), 409-425.

[31]Sam Bradley, "Cousins vs. Mydral: The Writer, Survival, and Western Culture," The Midwest Quarterly, 9, No. 1 (Aut. 1967), 11-20.

[32]"Robert Bly," The Sullen Art: Interviews by David Ossman with Modern American Poets, ed. David Ossman (New York: Corinth Books, 1963), pp. 39-43.

[33]The quotation is from Bly's translation of the poem: Lorca and Jimenez: Selected Poems, ed. and trans. Robert Bly (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 172-177.

[34]"Elegy/Some October Notes: Translated from the Swedish of Tomas Transtromer by Robert Bly," broadsheet (The Scepter Press, 1973).

[35]Bly, "Prose vs. Poetry," Choice, 2 (1962), 65-80.

[36]Bly, "Five Decades of Modern American Poetry," The Fifties, No. 1 (1958), 36-39.

[37]Gibbons, "Machado," p. 128.

[38]Michael Predmore, "The Vision of an Impoverished and Moribund Society in the "Soledades, Galerias y otros Poemas' of Antonio Machado," Ideologies and Literature, 11, No. 8 (Sept./Oct. 19780, 12-29.

[39]Bly, "Henrick Ibsen: On the Murder of Abraham Lincoln," The Nation, 196 (Feb. 16, 1963), 142.

[40]Bly, Chelsea, No. 24/25 (Oct. 1968), 32-46.

[41]Philip Stratford, "Creativity and Commitment in Contemporary Theatre," Humanities Association Bulletin, 15, No. 2 (Aut. 1964), 35-39.

[42]Gibbons, "Machado," ibid.

Chapter 2

[1]Molesworth, "Domesticating the Sublime: Bly's Latest Poems," The Ohio Review, 19, No. 3 (Fall 1978), 56-66; and, Ingegard Friberg, "Moving Inward: A Study of Robert Bly's Poetry," Diss, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1977, where it is argued that Bly's political and mystical poetry both employ the same recurring words, concepts, themes and archetypes.

[2]Bly's obsessive use of darkness has been severely criticized by Sandra McPherson, "You Can Say That Again. (Or Can You?)," The Iowa Review, 3, No. 3 (Sum. 1972), 70-75. But a glance at Russell E. Brown's "Time of Day in Early Expressionist Poetry," PMLA, 84, No. 1 (Jan. 1979), 20-28, reveals that, in Bly as in Trakl, it is the coming of darkness that is significant: the slow extinguishing of a world in which objects and patterns lose identity and clarity; not death but "the state of suffering, approaching death, the slow wasting away of the individual soul" (p. 23). Bly's obsession, in such terms, serves to characterize the way of life, or the rite de passage, through which he must pass to reach the ineffable.

[3]Bly, Jumping Out of Bed (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1973) [unpaginated].

[4]Mersmann, "Robert Bly: Driving Inland to the Sea," Late Harvest: Plains and Prairie Poets, ed. Robert Killorn (Kansas City: Bk Mk Press, 1977), 15-34.

[5]Bly, Leaping Poetry (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), pp. 66-67.

[6]Michael Atkinson, "Robert Bly's Sleepers Joining Hands/ Shadow and Self," Ohio Review, 3, No. 1 (Sp. 1976), 135-153.

[7]Alan Williamson, "Language Against Itself: The Middle Generation of Contemporary Poets," American Poetry Since 1960: Some Critical Perspectives, ed. Robert B. Shaw (Cheadle, Cheshire: Carcanet Press, 1973), pp. 55-67; Howard Nelson, "Welcoming Shadows: Robert Bly's Recent Poetry," The Hollins Critic, (Ap. 1975), 1-15; Anthony Libby, "Robert Bly: Alive in Darkness," The Iowa Review, 3, No. 3 (Sum. 1972), 78-89; Julian Gitzen, "Floating on Solitude: The Poetry of Robert Bly," Modern Poetry Studies, 7, No. 3 (Win. 1976), 231-240; and Mersmann's earlier essay "Robert Bly: Watering the Rocks," Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1974), pp. 113-157 -- are examples.

[8]Faas, "Robert Bly," does not deal with mysticism as I have but tries to relate Zen Buddhism and Olson's poetic to Bly's work. Altieri uses the terms "radical presence" and "immanence" to describe the poetics and epistemology of contemporary verse; his best work is in Enlarging the Temple (note 16, Chapter 1).

[9]Bly, The Morning Glory (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); and, This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). Cited hereafter as MG and TBCG.

[10]Horne, Studies in Religion, 6, No. 3 (1976/1977), 279-284.

[11]F. C. Happold, Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963).

[12]Westbrook, "The Practical Spirit: Sacrality and the American West," Western American Literature, 3, No. 3 (Fall 1968), 193-207.

[13]Gordon E. Pruett, "Will and Freedom: Psychoanalytic Themes in the Work of Jacob Boehme," Studies in Literature, 6, No. 3 (1976/1977), 241-251.

[14]Philip Dacey, "This Book Is Made of Turkey Soup and Star Music," Parnassus, (Fall/Win. 1978), 34-45. Molesworth: see note 1 to Chapter 2.

[15]Kenner, The New York Times Book Review (Jan. 1978).

[16]Latter, The Hudson Review 31, No. 1 (Sp. 1978).

[17]See note 29 to Chapter 1.

[18]Davie, "Slogging for the Absolute," Parnassus (Fall/Win. 1974), 9-22.

[19]Faas, "Robert Bly," ibid.

[20]Kristofer Schipper, "The Taoist Body," History of Religions, 17, No. 3/4 (Feb./Mar. 1978), 355-386.

[21]Edward H. Scafer, "The Jade Woman of Greatest Mystery," ibid., 387-398.

[22]Julian Jaynes, The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976).

[23]Paul W. Meyer, "The Holy Spirit in the Pauline Letters: A Contextual Exploration," Interpretation, 33, No. 1 (Jan. 1979), 3-18.

[24]See Chapter 1, p. 45.

[25]Sea and Honeycomb, p. 53.

[26]Ch. Vaudeville, Kabir: Volume I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 119. The poem is quoted by Vaudeville.

[27]Bly, The Kabir Book: Forty-Four of the Ecstatic Poems of Kabir (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977). Bly has used examples of Tantric art to illustrate this collection of version of the Tagore-Underhill versions of a Bengali version of the Hindi text. Bly says of his work: "If anyone speaking Hindi would like to help me, I'll do them over."

[28]Faas, "Robert Bly," ibid.

[29]Hermann J. Weigand, "The Poet's Dilemma: An Interpretation of Rilke's Second Duino Elegy," PMLA, 82, No. 1 (Mar. 1967), 3-13.

Chapter 3

[1]L. S. Dembo, Conceptions of Reality in Modern American Poetry (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 9-10.

[2]Ibid., p. 219.

[3]Bly, This Tree Will Be Here for A Thousand Years (New York: Harper and Row, 1979). Cited hereafter as TTTY.

[4]Altieri, "From Symbolist Thought to Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern American Poetics," Boundary 2, 1, No. 3 (Sp. 1972), 605-641; but particularly 623-624.

[5]Karl Malkoff, Escape for the Self: A Study in Contemporary American Poetry and Poetics (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1977), p. 1. Malkoff believes that "at least partial escape from the self has become a fundamental condition of poetry" in contemporary America (p. 178); Malkoff describes Bly's images as akin to "Pound's wish 'to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" (p. 145); see also: Warner

Berthoff, "A Literature Without Qualities: American Writing Since 1945," The Yale Review, 68, No. 2 (Dec. 1978), 235-255, where Berthoff sees a fundamentally religious imperative for writers to empty the self of all previously assigned qualities, in hope of recovering some lost integrity of self; and, Richard Howard's "Robert Bly," Alone With America: Essays on the Art of Poetry in the United States Since 1950 (New York: Atheum, 1969), pp. 38-48, where Bly's imagery of sea and death are used to argue that Bly would first escape the self before the dying body.

[6]Happold, Mysticism, p. 50. Happold explains that Jung's Self is closer to the mystic's spark, apex, centre, or ground of the soul. Also see: Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Nature and Self-Love: A Reinterpretation of Rouseau's 'Passion primative'," PMLA, 92, No. 5 (Oct. 1977), 890-903, where the self is regarded as an empty concept by Rouseau and Pascal. Other studies of selfloss as a poetic concept include: Ethel F. Cornwell, "Samuel Beckett: The Flight from Self," PMLA, 88, No. 1 (Jan. 1977), 41-52. But among those who believe that the Jungian Self is related to individuation, or self-growth and self-exploration: Albert Gelpi, The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Poet (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), particularly chapter 5; Robert Mitchel, "A Polemic for Poetry," Minnesota Review (Sp. 1977), 119-122; Louis Simpson, "Capturing the World as it Is," Ohio Review, 14, No. 3 (Sp. 1973), 34-51; William Heyen, "Inward to the World: The Poetry of Robert Bly," The Far Point (Fall/Win. 1969), particularly pp. 43-44; and Michael Atkinson, "Robert Bly's 'Sleepers Joining Hands'/ Shadow and Self," The Iowa Review, 7, No. 4 (Fall 1976), 135-153.

[7]Quarterly Review of Literature, 12, No. 1/2 (1962), 144-148.

[8]The New Poets, ed. M. L. Rosenthal (New York: Mentor Books, 1965), pp. 25-28.

[9]Merle Brown, "Criticism as the Animus of Poetry," Stand, 8, No. 4 (1967), 45-52.

[10]Tom Vander Ven, "Robert Frost's Dramatic Principle of 'Oversound'," American Literature, 45, No. 2 (May 1973), 238-251; T. S. Eliot, "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama," The Sacred Wood.

[11]See: Jay Shir, "Wittgenstein's Aesthetics and the Theory of Literature," Aesthetics, 18, No. 1 (Win. 1978), 3-11; Elmer F. Suderman, "Art as a Way of Knowing," Discourse, 12, No. 1 (Win. 1969), 3-14; and Dembo, "Imagism and Aesthetic Mysticism," Conceptions of Reality, pp. 10-47.

[12]Anthony Libby, "Fire and Light: Four Poets to the End and Beyond," The Iowa Review, 4, No. 2 (Sp. 1973), 111-126.

[13]Bly, Leaping Poetry, pp. 62-67.

[14]See TPJ, and Geoffrey Thurley, The American Moment: American Poetry in the Mid-Century (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), particularly 217-226.

[15]On "codes": John M. Lipski, "On the Meta-structure of Literary Discourse," Journal of Literary Semantics, 2 (Oct. 1976), 53-62. "Stark images that suggest, but do not support, metaphorical interpretation -- images that Walter Killy was the first to call Chiffren 'ciphers'": see Pauline Yu, "The Poetics of Discontinuity: East-West Correspondences in Lyric Poetry," PMLA, 94, No. 2 (Mar. 1979), 261-274.

[16]Anthony Piccione, "Robert Bly and the Deep Image," Diss, Ohio Univ., 1969, p. 68.

[17]Norman N. Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," PMLA, 90, No. 5 (Oct. 1975), 813-821.

[18]James Guimond, "After Imagism," Ohio Review, 15, No. 1 (Fall 1973), 5-28; and Molesworth, "Domesticating the Sublime."

[19]On the philosophical debate on images, see: A. Hannay, Mental Images: A Defence (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971); Lensing and Moran, Four Poets, p. 11; Donald Hall, "The Expression Without the Song," Michigan Quarterly Review, 8, No. 4 (1969), 223-225; Altieri, "Objective Image and Act of Mind in Modern Poetry," PMLA, 91, No. 1 (Jan. 1976), 101-113, and "Northrop Frye and the Problem of Spiritual Authority," PMLA, 87, No. 5 (Oct. 1972), 964-975; and Robert Audi, "The Ontological Status of Mental Images," Inquiry, 21, No. 3 (Aut. 1978), 348-362.

[20]On surrealism, see: Edward B. Germain, "Introduction," English and American Surrealist Poetry, ed. Edward B. Germain (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 24-54; J. M. Coetzee, "Surreal Metaphors and Random Processes," Journal of Literary Semantics, 8, No. 1 (Ap. 1979), 22-30; and Piccione, "Robert Bly and the Deep Image," passim.

[21]Pinsky, The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and its Traditions (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), particularly pp. 62-73.

[22]George Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), particularly pp. 32-39.

[23]Fahmy Farag, "The Poet at a Nation's Daimon: The Cabbalistic Politics of W. B. Yeats," Canadian Journal of Irish Studies, 2, No. 2 (Dec. 1976), 32-46.

[24]Ernest M. Wold, "Rilke's 'L'Ange du Meridien': A Thematic Analysis," PMLA, 80, No. 1 (Mar. 1965), 9-18.

[25]Barbara Lefkowitz, "Blake and the Natural World," PMLA, 89, No. 1 (Jan. 1974), 121-131.

[26]Douglas Brownlow Wilson, "Two Modes of Apprehending Nature: A Gloss on the Coleridgean Symbol," PMLA, 87, No. 1 (Jan. 1972), 42-52.

[27]Emerson, "Nature," The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York, 1940), pp. 2-42.

[28]Kinnell, "The Poetics of the Physical World," The Hudson Review, 2, No. 3 (Sum 1971), 113-126.

[29]Sauer, quoted by Donald Davie in "Landscape as Poetic Focus," The Poet in the Imaginary Museum: Essays of Two Decades (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1977), pp. 165-169 discusses Kinnell's article (note 28).

[30]Thurley, American Moment, p. 131.

[31]In "The Lamb and the Pinecone," Neruda and Vallejo: Selected Poems, ed. Robert Bly (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 156-164 Bly repeatedly asks Neruda -- in the interview -- about the humanity, affection, and "human simplicity" that Bly admires in the Spanish writers' work.

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